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AN ORDER TO VIEW

*BY THE SAME AUTHOR*

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Now !

The Dewpond

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Davenport

The Grave Impertinence

etc.

# AN ORDER TO VIEW

*A NOVEL*                    ::                    ::                    ::

*By CHARLES MARRIOTT*                    ::

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**TO MICHAEL DRAYTON**

**860706**



# AN ORDER TO VIEW

## CHAPTER I

ON the way down to his office in Broad Street, after lunch at his rooms overlooking the many towers of Barstow, James Wedmore stopped on the hill, where the trams made a sharp turn, to read an auctioneers' advertisement on the high supporting wall of the terrace above. He read to the bottom of the bill, with a critical eye to the lettering, before he took in that the contents might concern him as a man as the form had attracted him as an architect.

The bill advertised a small fifteenth-century manor-house with an estate of sixty acres, five miles from Barstow, called "Moorend," the property of the Dowager Countess Kelmscot, to be sold by auction at the end of November.

It was now late September. After glancing again at the name of the auctioneers, Wedmore, who was a broad-shouldered, slow-moving man of thirty-five, went down the hill at his usual pace, and picked his way deliberately across the wide plain, dangerous and noisy with converging trams from all outskirts of the city, where deep-sea adventure came to a sudden stop.

As he glanced reflectively at the steamers unloading at the quays on his right, there was nothing in Wedmore's manner to show that he had changed his plans for the afternoon. Under the shining tower of Saint Michael's, with its traceried parapet, he turned aside from the way to his own office to reach Messrs. Till and Sapperton's in Corn Street. Its neighbourhood to the tower which had decided his lodging in the terrace above, where he could see the tower from his windows, affected him as an encouraging accident in his present purpose.

Wedmore sent in his card with a request for an order to view the property he had seen advertised. Mr. Till himself, in breeches and gaiters, came out from the inner office with a great smell of Harris tweed, the card in his hand and a smile of respectful recognition at the name, on his weather-beaten face. Among the paper symbols of his trade he looked like the embodiment of real estate—his bluff appearance affecting Wedmore like the ships among the houses outside.

"Are you thinking of bidding for Moorend, Mr. Wedmore?" said Mr. Till, in a tone of more than professional interest.

"Sir John Pumphrey might feel inclined to," said Wedmore. He did not think it necessary to add that his future father-in-law, the wealthy ship-owner, would be bidding in his interest; a residence being his handsome though not very convenient proposal for a wedding-gift; but Mr. Till nodded comprehendingly.

"Exactly," he said, as if Sir John's large way of doing things were to be taken for granted. "May

I say, Mr. Wedmore," he went on in a more personal tone, attractively shy, considering the difference in their ages, "that Sir John has never done anything better for Barstow than bringing you here? . . . I don't think," he added, with a knowing smile which showed that if he didn't know Sir John's precise intention he was aware of all the circumstances, "that I need to congratulate *you*."

"No, I'm a lucky man," said Wedmore, with a swift smile on his rather moody face, as he felt the sincerity of the compliment from a stranger to him. A countryman himself, he felt at ease with Mr. Till, whose whole appearance and manner bespoke an outdoor occupation.

"How do you get to Moorend?" Wedmore went on, as he took the pink order to view from the clerk, who, as if impressed by the conversation, had filled it in ready without a word from his employer.

"Train to Upton," said Mr. Till, and glanced up at the clock. "You have plenty of time to catch the two-thirty for Churton Abbey by the Midland. It stops at Upton. Then you go about a mile along the London road, and take a bridle-path on the left through the Valley of Rocks. You can't miss the Rocks. But," he hesitated, "wouldn't you like to telephone to Sir John—or the ladies? A pleasant day for the car——"

"No," said Wedmore, without consideration, "I want to see Moorend first."

Mr. Till nodded approvingly at his decided manner.

"*Wait* till you see Moorend!" he murmured.

"But—sixty acres!" said Wedmore, thinking aloud rather than asking for reassurance,

“No need to worry about that, Mr. Wedmore,” said Mr. Till with alacrity. “You—Sir John—could easily let or sell the greater part of the estate. As a matter of fact,” he went on confidentially, “only about ten acres is rented with the house at present; the rest is farmed by different people; but the property has to be sold as one lot, and by auction. Yes, taxation. Lady Kelmescot, like everybody else, is feeling the draught; and this is the only part of the late earl’s estate which is not entailed.”

“Who lives at Moorend now?”

“Some people called Woodruff. The late Mr. Woodruff was a college friend of the earl’s, and had Moorend from him at a nominal rent. He was Guy Woodruff, the author, you know. A character. . . .”

The name conveyed nothing to Wedmore, but he did not take advantage of the pause to ask the evidently expected question.

“Woodruff died about three years ago,” Mr. Till went on, “and his son and daughter are living at Moorend now.”

“They will have to turn out.”

“Obviously,” said Mr. Till, smiling at Wedmore’s effect of speaking to himself; “but you need not be breaking your heart on their account. They also, I gather, find it difficult to keep up even a small place in the country; and I understand that young Mr. Woodruff—he is a musician and, by the way, organist at Saint Michael’s here—is rather glad than otherwise to be relieved of the responsibility of making up his mind to move. He would like to live in London.” He added, sinking his voice, “This, by the way, is between ourselves; for your

personal satisfaction as a considerate man. I do not know the Woodruffs, though of course I have talked to them in going over the house ; I am only quoting Lady Kelmscot's agent about their personal affairs."

With the half-conscious reflection, inspired by what he did not know in Mr. Till's words, that there might be room for differences of opinion in the Woodruffs' personal affairs, Wedmore asked if he might telephone to his partner to say that he should not be at the office that afternoon ; and when he had done so, Mr. Till said :

" You will find Moorend looking rather neglected, Mr. Wedmore, but the house will speak for itself. It would be an impertinence for me to describe it to a gentleman of your profession."

His tone and manner were in keeping with Wedmore's curious feeling that he himself was acting not from choice but in obedience to destiny in going to look at Moorend. Mr. Till did not seem to be taking into account the possibilities of auction ; and with, at that moment, the chiming of the first quarter from Saint Michael's tower, the matter might have been already settled.

As if, indeed, it had been, Mr. Till said as, warned by the sound, they moved to the door, " When are we to expect the opening of the Technical Institute, Mr. Wedmore ? "

" Ah, that depends on the contractors," said Wedmore, " but they are well forward. Probably in the spring."

Mr. Till looked knowing as he bowed Wedmore away ; and Wedmore, with mingled feelings, guessed that Mr. Till knew that his marriage was to coincide

with the opening of the Institute which Sir John Pumphrey was presenting to his native city in memory of the war, and he had designed in competition. Thus, Wedmore owed his happiness to the Institute; but there were times when he wished that the two things were not so much mixed up. Together with Sir John's choice of a wedding-gift, it made his love seem rather—conditional, he supposed was the word; and he wondered now if it were not, after all, rather rash to look out for a home before he was married.

He was not superstitious, but as he passed he glanced up for luck at the tower which had taken such a strong hold upon his imagination. Though the Institute was of his own designing, it did not seem to be so deeply connected with his love as the tower; and if he were to supplant the organist of Saint Michael's in his home, some sort of propitiation seemed advisable.



## CHAPTER II

WEDMORE'S short railway journey out of Barstow was depressing enough to a man of his temperament, particularly on a September afternoon of even sunlight which had no mercy upon the works of man. The slums, factories and gasworks of the industrial belt afflicted Wedmore less than the suburbs which followed. The factories, at any rate, were reasonably well adapted to their purposes.

He supposed that glue, soap, leather and bonemanure, as he smelt and tasted them in sequence, had to be made, and it was difficult to see how they could be made any other way. One or two tall chimneys, indeed, gave him the thrill of beauty; not as a painter would feel it, but in his nerves; as if he lived in their construction. It was in his nerves, too, that he presently suffered the villas, as, with the now visible lines of the land flowing through him with the movement of the train, he felt them jar.

His eyes were the channels rather than the critics of his discomfort, and he could have believed that the jolting of the train was caused by what he saw. These irrelevant inventions of brick and bargeboarding, in a land where stone was plentiful, whose perky gables wounded the green or the blue, were infinitely worse than the drab outskirts of London,

for example. What was there a necessary dullness was here a gratuitous affront. As Wedmore sat, in the middle of the seat, upright as if to avoid the shocks into which the sights were translated by his unwilling eyes, his look of peculiar stillness, due to his broad head, short neck and flat brow, was disturbed at intervals by a fine flicker of pain. A close observer, taking in the shrapnel scar on his left cheek, which was his only relic of the war, might have supposed him to be suffering from neuralgia.

For the first half-mile or so, after alighting, there was little to compose him. It was now, though a main road, a country road; but the longer intervals of green and grey, so far from relieving, intensified the wrongness of the houses; for it was wrongness rather than ugliness that Wedmore felt in his nerves. The houses affected him like ill-fitting clothes.

Even the occasional facing of Churton Abbey stone, anticipation of the city which the train he had left must now be nearing, was misused rather than used; and, to the finished and occupied specimens of his craftiness, rather than his craft, were presently added the preliminary indeencies of the builder. Before long the two cities, so beautiful and right in their contrasted beginnings as busy port and Roman retreat, would have mingled the spawn of their degeneration in ten miles of disorder.

But, presently, Wedmore came to a long grey wall on his left, and his nerves relaxed in sympathy with its well-being: the "lineaments of satisfied desire" in stone. His negative pleasure, as at the removal of pain, quickly became positive as the wall rose to the outlines of a group of farm buildings. The lift

and spread of them, the slope of roofs and the spacing of windows, stirred his blood as a tune would stir the blood of a musician. His very walk was affected, eased and slowed and yet made more confident, as if he trod upon firmer ground ; and his look became sensual. If he could have described his pleasure he would not have called it refined, but akin to bodily passion, with a pang in it as well as a relief.

Where the wall returned to form the gable end of a great barn, the white road began rapidly to descend ; and then Wedmore came to a little stone bridge.

Now Mr. Till's direction was justified : there was no missing the Valley of Rocks. As he leant on the parapet of the bridge, Wedmore's emotional enjoyment was turned to critical speculation. The Valley of Rocks, a limestone gorge, impressive by character rather than extent, watered by what was a narrow lake rather than a stream, except where it ran under the bridge, was, he saw, a freak in this neighbourhood—as, indeed, its name implied.

The Cotswolds were far to the north, and the Mendips to the south, so that there was nothing to explain it geologically. It was, in fact, a miniature version of that great gorge of Cleeve which meant so much to Wedmore because the Pumphreys lived on the further side ; though its unexpectedness in these green fields made it, imaginatively, more akin to Cheddar.

The Cleeve woods, which had half-concealed his first vision of the home of his beloved, were mimicked here by a hanging of small beeches, already flecked with brown ; and, on the right-hand bank of the lake which reflected them, like a steel mirror, a wide

path was visible for a moment before it rounded the little cliff whose crinkled cornice was pale gold above the violet shadow which, at this afternoon hour, filled the valley.

Wedmore stayed for a few moments, following with his body rather than his eyes the exquisite architecture of the limestone, a tender smile playing about his determined mouth. Absorbed in the character of the scene, he forgot for the moment its promise. It made of Moorend a secret place. Properly, he said to himself, as he swung away from the parapet and resumed his walk, there should be dragons.

There was, he observed, as he rounded the corner he had seen from the bridge, a man coming soberly towards him. He looked between middle-aged and elderly, he was muffled about the throat, and walked with a stout stick like a valetudinarian. While there was yet a considerable distance between them, Wedmore was aware that the stranger was gazing at him fixedly with a glance which nearer approach proved to be both speculative and quizzical ; and then the garb of the tall, bulky figure, which had looked vaguely clerical, resolved itself into overcoat and wideawake.

Till had described Mr. Woodruff as "young," so this could not be he ; but some air of rights in the stranger impelled Wedmore to explain his own presence by saying, "Is this the way to Moorend ?"

"It won't take you anywhere else," said the stranger good-humouredly, "without passing through Moorend. I've just come from there. I'll walk back with you. We shall find Miss Woodruff at home."

His quietly self-assured manner, as he continued to size Wedmore up, running his eye over him with the slightly patronising though friendly glance of a professional student of character, and, apparently, with approval of his build, made Wedmore wonder who he was. His appearance, with melting brown eyes and a long drooping moustache, and the careless arrangement of the amber silk scarf about his throat, suggested a romantic temperament and a weakness for the picturesque; a hint of the Spanish Main; and, when they had gone a few paces, Wedmore was on the point of stating his name and business in the hope of an informing reply, when the stranger said abruptly,

“No, I won’t; good-afternoon, sir.”

Without further words, he touched the brim of his wideawake, turned on his heel and resumed his first direction.

Wedmore was old enough not to be disconcerted by this abruptness, and further speculation about the stranger was checked by the revelation of the next few yards. The wooded cliff on his right fell away to form the gentle slope of a green basin, and the lake bordered a lawn. Across the lawn, backed by woods, there was Moorend.

The effect upon Wedmore was that of coming home. All that he meant by good building was here confirmed with a modesty which left him strangely sobered. The house was, indeed, not large, nor had it any striking originality of design. It was all a matter of perfect proportion and, so far as the distance allowed him to see, perfect finish.

The central tower and part of the front were

mantled with close-growing ivy, which blurred without effacing the discreet relief of string-course and dripstone, and only enhanced the pale, clean curves of the doorway, sharply defined by the shadow below.

Except for the battlements of the tower, the diagonal setting of the chimney-shafts, and the inverted finials on the gables, there was no ornament save that afforded by the trefoil-headed windows and the rosettes of their hood-mouldings. Facing a little to the west of south, the house took the level sunlight of the hour with delicate advantage to all its details.

Even from that distance, where he had halted in sheer respect, Wedmore knew that nearer approach would only bring him a deepening of delight. Perfection of detail was implied in the modesty of the whole.

Signs of the neglect which Till had spoken of were not wanting; the lawn was uncut and in bad condition, and, as Wedmore drew near to them, he saw that the borders of the terrace were unweeded and poorly planted. A clutter of hens, disturbed in their scratching by his footsteps on the gravel, bustled off cackling through an untidy shrubbery on the right.

From the direction of the drive, swinging round from behind the house on the left, he gathered that the carriage approach to Moorend left the main road somewhere beyond the bridle-path he had taken. The village, if there were one, would lie in that direction and outside the green basin with its barrier of wood which made of Moorend a secret place.

Wedmore's ring at the open inner door of what resembled a church porch, with stone benches, under the tower, was answered by a tidy, middle-aged woman, more like a housekeeper than an ordinary servant, since she wore neither cap nor apron. Her anxious glance and darting movement, as she slanted half her body round the doorway, suggested the unwelcome interruption of a busy person. She took the order to view without comment, and retired as hastily as she had come.

The open door, and the absolute stillness of the afternoon, enabled Wedmore to hear what followed : a murmur, then "Who?" another murmur, and then "Bother!" But the last word was not the one which disconcerted him; for with the first he received an impression so cool, soft and fragrant that it might have been the voice of the house itself.

Once, in his youth, Wedmore had picked violets in the dusk at Lelant in Cornwall; and the experience, without consequence or association other than those of a pleasant holiday with his parents, had ever afterwards remained in his mind as meaning danger. He had been disarmed. The feel of the wet leaves, the stealing odour and the faint warning of a hooter-buoy off the coast on a mild afternoon in December, had combined to leave him open to whatever might befall.

Nothing, then, had happened; but the mood, however invoked, by look or sound, had been the occasion of all his lapses from what he took to be virtue; though, as surely, it had been present in the most authentic inspirations of his craft.

Whether from the fragrance of the name—for he

supposed it to be Miss Woodruff speaking—or from some suggestion in the word of the sound of the buoy, the “Who?” disarmed him now. The house had brought him very near to himself, and the sound removed the last veil. Certainly he had been rash to come; and his feeling as, after a lengthy murmur, he heard the words, “No, I had better see him myself,” was half the fear lest the speaker’s appearance should destroy the spell of her voice, and half the fear that it would not.



### CHAPTER III

THE effect upon Wedmore, when Miss Woodruff appeared, was to make him respectfully hostile in manner. Her good looks could not be denied, though, for that very reason, they nerved him against her voice—as the recognition of an enemy may bring courage. She was a slim girl of about six and twenty, with a pale face and cloudy hair, clad in a grey frock which elongated the lines of her figure. With one hand on the jamb of the doorway, and the other holding the pink order, she looked at Wedmore with no curiosity in her grey eyes, and said, with cool and, it seemed, slightly haughty politeness,

“ Won’t you come in ? ”

Wedmore, his broad shoulders braced with the effort to seem at ease, crossed the flags with the heavy tread of a policeman; and, for his pains, stumbled at the worn step of the inner doorway. He said “ Damn ! ” irritably.

Miss Woodruff made no comment at the exclamation, but went on : “ I am sorry that my brother is not in. He is at his room in Cleve where he takes his pupils.”

Wedmore murmured something civil to the information, which betrayed a certain simplicity by

assuming a knowledge of her brother's occupation which he only had by accident ; and, to make amends for his involuntary awkwardness, he added,

"It is a very beautiful house."

"Yes, I suppose it is," said Miss Woodruff carelessly.

"Suppose!" he exclaimed, in spite of himself.

"Well, you see, I live here," she said.

"Well, you see," he retorted, mimicking her manner with a boyish attempt to get the upper hand, "I happen to be a builder—an architect."

She laughed at the retort, showing white teeth between her pink lips, and said indulgently, as if he had been the boy he aped,

"That must be a very interesting thing to be. . . . This," she led the way into a room on the right, "is the dining-room."

Luncheon, in fact, had not yet been cleared away ; and Wedmore, glancing at the wine and fruit on the table, wondered if he were glad or sorry that the late guest had left him in the lurch. Miss Woodruff made no apology for the state of the room, but waited gravely for his remarks.

The interior of the house—as, indeed, advertised by the character of the chimneys—had evidently been reconstructed about a century later than the original building ; but that, as further alteration, only enhanced the effect of livingness. Like a good constitution, the house would bear any amount of pulling about. There was no break anywhere, and the Victorian furniture and pictures did not look out of keeping.

"Look at that!" said Wedmore, under his breath.

“That” was the four-centred arch of the fireplace, the Tudor roses in the spandrels confirming the idea he had formed from the chimneys.

Miss Woodruff looked, but, as if aware that the remark had not been addressed to her, made no comment, but said,

“Are you a Barstow architect?”

Taken off his guard by the simplicity of her manner, Wedmore found himself saying, “Only lately. I designed the new Technical Institute, and that brought me down from London; and then—I stayed.”

“Then,” said Miss Woodruff, with her head on one side as she offered him a dish of plums, “you must be rather—a swell.”

The last word, unbecoming her lips, made him colour, bringing out the scar on his cheek; for nothing had been further from his thoughts than to try to impress her. All he wanted was to protect himself.

“Oh, it was just a piece of luck,” he said, as he took a plum—thinking of the apple.

“I remember the picture in the Barstow paper,” Miss Woodruff went on as she sucked a plum like a boy. “Dr. Shipton said it was a damn sight too good for its purpose.”

He laughed, rather sorely, the reflection on his professional capacity, as he felt it to be, making him ignore for the moment the raciness of the quotation.

“That is not exactly a compliment to an architect,” he said.

“Oh, I don’t know anything about architecture,”

said Miss Woodruff hastily; "nor, I think, does Dr. Shipton. It is only that he does not believe in Technical Institutes, and he does not like Sir John Pumphrey."

The name, said innocently, appealed to Wedmore's sense of humour, and deferred the explanation which he supposed he ought to be making. Loyalty, however, compelled him to say:

"Sir John Pumphrey has done a great deal for Barstow."

"If you had come half an hour earlier," said Miss Woodruff, as he turned to leave the room, "you would have met Dr. Shipton. He was here to lunch."

"Then I met him!" exclaimed Wedmore, stopping short. "A big man, afraid of catching cold."

Miss Woodruff laughed out at the description. "Poor Dr. Shipton!" she said. "He enjoys every disease under the sun."

"But I should never have guessed him to be a doctor," said Wedmore, thinking aloud, and wondering at the doctor's abrupt behaviour.

"He does not practise now," said Miss Woodruff, "though he will attend in an emergency, an accident or an unexpected maternity case, or anything of that sort. He writes books about 'ologies which nobody reads." In the doorway she added, in a lower tone, "He was my father's greatest friend, you know."

Wedmore's reflection, as he winced at the momentary proximity, enhanced in its effect by the confidential murmur, was that Dr. Shipton had played him an unfriendly trick by leaving him in

the lurch; and when the woman who had admitted him addressed his guide in the passage as "Miss Beatrice," he took it as a personal grievance. If her voice had disarmed him, and her looks confirmed his defencelessness, the combination "Beatrice Woodruff" was hitting below the belt. From the moment he read the advertisement of Moorend, there seemed to have been a conspiracy to beguile him.

Not that he was afraid of falling in love with Miss Woodruff; most emphatically not; he was quite securely in love with Hilda Pumphrey. What he feared—or had feared, for he thought he was master of himself now—was as remote from love, as he understood it, as poison is from honest bread.

Still less did he suppose that Miss Woodruff had any designs upon him; she was the incarnation of indifference. The attraction—if a thing so inconvenient could be called an attraction—she had for him was as little her fault as it was his choice to be exposed to it; she might be compared to the "carrier" of a disease, herself immune. His complaint against her, if he could have put it into words, would have been that she ought not to be left about. On guard against her, and remembering past mistakes, he could even regard his fear with sardonic amusement—as the weakness of our little brother, the ass.

The somewhat unusual feature in the untidy room she called the sitting-room, to the left of the porch, of a pedal piano, led him to speak of her brother.

"Yes, Martin is a musician," said Miss Woodruff,

“a composer. For a living he takes pupils in Cleeve, and he plays the organ at Saint Michael’s, Barstow. He goes backwards and forwards on a push-bike. . . . Poor old Martin,” she added, after a pause, “he will be glad to get away from Moorend. Not that he does not love the place, but that he finds it impossible to keep in decent order on his income since the war, and he is a hopeless person at outdoor things. My father was different.”

“And you?” said Wedmore, struck by her curious detachment.

“I keep house for Martin,” she said quietly.

He was quite sure, now, that she did not share her brother’s gladness at the prospect of getting away from Moorend, but he shirked an expression of sympathy. If he once let himself go in that direction he would find himself inventing impossible plans to enable her to stop. A glance round at the shelves prompted him to say:

“I’m afraid I haven’t read any of your father’s books, Miss Woodruff.”

“Nor have I, not through,” she said calmly.

“Aren’t they interesting?” he exclaimed in astonishment.

“Oh yes,” she replied, “I didn’t mean that. What I meant was that I don’t need to—because they are his. I often dip into them.”

“You mean that he talked to you about them?” said Wedmore, who felt that he had not got to the bottom of her unfilial attitude.

“No, not exactly that,” she said, looking at him with some impatience in her grey eyes; “I mean, because they were his—or he was his books, which—

ever way you like to put it. . . . Oh, if you had known him you would understand."

"What did he write?" said Wedmore, seeing that explanation was beyond her, and unwilling to follow her into the region of sentiment indicated by the tone of her last sentence.

"Some poems, but mostly novels and essays," she said. "I'll lend you one of his books, if you like. Remind me when we've been round."

Wedmore said that he certainly would. His ignorance of Woodruff's work neither surprised himself nor implied its unpopularity; he was notoriously ignorant of books, and still more of writers, except in his own profession.

As he followed Miss Woodruff through the rooms upstairs, he found himself applying to her relation to the house what she had said about her father's work; though he could not have decided whether it was that you didn't need to see the house, or didn't need to see her. The only thing certain was that they went together, and that it was ridiculous to think of taking one without the other. If you didn't want, or couldn't have, Miss Woodruff, you had no business with Moorend.

He had been a rash fool to come, but he must see it through; taking care that, by no choice of her own, Miss Woodruff didn't have *him*. He surmised that her father's work also went with the house and went with her; and that made him curious to read it. There could be no great danger in Miss Woodruff on paper.

Miss Woodruff herself did not seem to be aware of having any special relation to the house. She

was alive to architectural beauties when they were pointed out, but blessedly ignorant of their historical and technical meanings. As she said, she lived there. Though she seemed to have sound ideas about convenience and inconvenience, she did not strike him as a very enthusiastic housekeeper; and though the rooms gave evidence of some neglect, due, he supposed, to shortness of labour, she was entirely without the common feminine dislike of being taken at a disadvantage, and she apologised for nothing. Her "That's my bedroom," as she passed the door without stopping, was, he felt, a taking for granted of his delicacy rather than an evasion of any disorder there might be within.

So far as Wedmore could make out, the woman who had answered his ring was the only servant, except a boy working among the vegetables in the large, untidy garden at the back of the house. Miss Woodruff loved flowers, and she confessed to liking "pottering about" in the garden, but it did not need much knowledge of the subject to see that she was not an expert gardener. The home farm, she explained, was now let to a Mr. Maggs, who had been employed by her father.



## CHAPTER IV

WEDMORE could not have said whether it was due to Miss Woodruff's inefficiency as a housekeeper, or his own distraction from what should have been his proper business, that they forgot the kitchen until after they had seen everything else. When they got there, Mrs. Dando—as the servant was called—was preparing tea; and Wedmore understood that, whether by order or on her own initiative, she was expecting him to share it. For a more questionable reason than modesty he assumed the latter.

Since he had last seen her, Mrs. Dando's look of vexation at his interruption of her duties had been smoothed away, and she now embraced him and his companion with a placid smile of approval. This made him feel that his overheard conversation must have been too free and easy; and, with a keen sense of the explanation he had yet to make, he spoke rather stiffly to the business in hand, commending the dresser and making pointed inquiries about the hot-water supply; whereat the two women exchanged admiring glances, as if to say, "Bless the little man!"

When Miss Woodruff said, "Well, I think that's everything; now let's have some tea," Wedmore attempted some excuse; but Mrs. Dando observed,

buttering her bread, "If the young gentleman is going back to Barstow, there isn't a train before five-twenty." Certainly, if there were a conspiracy to beguile him, Mrs. Dando was in it.

Over their noble tea, which, he noticed, Miss Woodruff consumed with slow enjoyment, she said, in a pause,

"Well, are you going to buy Moorend?"

While he hesitated over the form of his explanation, she added, savouring a spoonful of medlar jelly,

"I think I should like you to buy it," pretty much as if he had been what she was tasting.

That made immediate explanation imperative, and he rushed at it with, "The truth is, Miss Woodruff, I am looking at it for Sir John Pumphrey!"

To his relief, she was amused at rather than embarrassed by the name. "I'm always putting my foot in it!" she exclaimed.

To make one story of it, he went on, "I am engaged to be married to Sir John Pumphrey's elder daughter, and he is generous enough to provide us with a house."

"Then you are not married already?" she said in mild surprise.

"Lord, no!" he exclaimed.

"I somehow thought you were," said Miss Woodruff calmly, engaged with her jelly.

"But why?"

"Oh, I don't know," she said carelessly; and went on, "Well, will Sir John and Miss Pumphrey like Moorend?"

"They'll rave about it," he said emphatically; but even as he said it he knew that Moorend would

not like them. Dr. Shipton's remark about his design for the Institute, which, almost without his knowing it, had been rankling in his professional mind, joined up with his late reflections about Woodruff's work and his daughter's relation to Moorend.

For better or worse, a building must be adapted to its purpose; and the purpose of Moorend was, precisely, Miss Woodruff. Having seen and heard her there, you would never be able to think of the place without her.

Equally, the purpose of Moorend wasn't Hilda Pumphrey. She would rave about it, but she wouldn't *be* it; she would wear it on her sleeve. Alarmed at these reflections, Wedmore assured himself that it was a virtue in Hilda, the virtue of her qualities. She was too big and shining, too free in the range of her bright intelligence, to fit Moorend. Secret places, where women lurked, were not for Hilda. Imagine Hilda lurking!

Too much concerned with her tea—she was, he asserted in passing, inclined to be sensual—to notice his preoccupation, Miss Woodruff observed,

“You'll have to let them see Moorend, you know.”

“Oh yes, if I may,” he said brightly, though he was already considering possible ways of weaning Hilda from Moorend without her seeing it. He would have to tell her that he had been there—though there seemed, at the moment, to be no practical reason why he must.

“Because,” said Miss Woodruff, popping a piece of cake into her mouth, and with a simmer of amusement in her grey eyes, “if I may say so, Mr.

Wedmore, you may be a good architect, but you don't seem to know very much about housekeeping."

Taken with her remark that she had supposed him to be married already, this needed explanation; and the discovery that, while he had been judging her, she had been judging him, was disconcerting; but he asked no questions, and said,

"Mine, of course, would be only the professional report."

"For instance," said Miss Woodruff, spreading superfluous cream upon her cake, "how many bedrooms are there?"

"Let me see," he began, "three—four—oh, but we really don't need to bother about these details now. Lady Pumphrey, at any rate, will have to see the house before anything is decided."

He was acutely conscious of "and all the little Pumphreys" in Miss Woodruff's eyes, as she licked her long fingers; and, both to change the subject and avoid the sight of an action which made her inconveniently human, he glanced at some manuscript music lying near him, and said:

"What has your brother composed, Miss Woodruff?"

"He is just finishing a Choral Symphony which is to be called 'Saint Michael and All Angels,'" she said.

With a passing tribute to the chiming words on her lips, he exclaimed: "From the church where he plays—the church with the tower?"

"Yes," said Miss Woodruff, with a quick glance at his eager face; "the bells put it into his head."

"The tower is the most lovely thing in Barstow,"

said Wedmore quietly, as he leant back in his chair, having lunged forward in his eagerness.

“So Martin says. Not that he knows any more about architecture than I do; but he says that it looks like what it sounds.”

“By God, he’s right!” said Wedmore, forgetting himself at a comparison which had long evaded him. Reminded of his own habitual interests, he felt instinctively in his pocket for his pipe.

Miss Woodruff nodded. “Yes, smoke,” she said, “I don’t. . . . You must talk to Martin,” she went on comfortably, as if their future association were a matter of course; “you will like him. Of course it isn’t fair to describe music in words, but Martin’s idea is that you mustn’t try to improve things too much—life or anything else; otherwise you drive away the angels—like the fairies—as well as the bad things. Dr. Shipton, by the way, says that’s very sound physiology—or bacteriology, I forget which. However, Martin says, ‘Trust your angels, and take all risks.’ I’ve put it badly, but that is the general idea he has tried to express. But,” she smiled broadly, “you mustn’t think that Martin’s music is solemn. He hates the big, bow-wow note just as much as my father did. There’s an awfully jolly part, where the angels have been improved away, all very correct and priggish—like Beckmesser, you know, in the *Meistersinger*, though Martin isn’t a bit Wagnerian in style. More like Mozart. Then comes ‘Hell and Tommy,’ as Martin calls it—that’s frightfully modern—but gradually the angels come back again; a *bouche fermée* chorus, rising and rising until it breaks out into ‘Hosannas!’

You can positively *see* them coming down the wind ! It ends up with angels and bells all mixed up together in a glorious peal ! ”

She had become flushed and excited with her description, and, because he was moved, Wedmore said, rather tritely :

“ So the angels come back to Barstow ? ”

“ You’ve got it ! ” she said delightedly ; “ that’s just what Martin means. It’s the bells guarding the old part, the ships and slums, compared with the barren look of the new part, that put the idea into his head.” After a moment she added, “ I love Barstow, and I hate Cleeve ! ”

“ Oh, there are good things in Cleeve,” he protested, feeling both loverly and professionally loyal.

“ I expect it’s partly because I was sent to school there,” said Miss Woodruff. She smiled reminiscently, and added, “ But only for one term.”

Her speaking of herself brought back what had been for some time his chief though hardly acknowledged concern.

“ I say,” he said, “ you’ll hate leaving Moorend.”

“ Can’t be helped,” she said lightly ; “ it’s got to be sold, anyhow, or Lady Kelmescot would never have turned us out, and we can’t afford to buy. . . . Besides,” she added doggedly, “ it really will be a good thing for Martin. He has the place on his mind, if not on his back, and he ought to be in London. There are no chances for him in Barstow or Cleeve. Of course, if I could hustle round and keep things in order for him, it would be different ; but I really can’t ; and it simply won’t run to more labour.”

That was her only reference to the shortness of money which was evident throughout the house.

“But what will you do?” Wedmore persisted, feeling that the difference in their ages justified his concern about her future.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she said carelessly; “it depends on what Martin does. I may go on keeping house for him—wherever he settles—or there are two aunts in London who would be glad to have me; or Lady Kelmscot, who is a great dear, may find me a job. Though,” she added with a laugh, “Heaven knows what. I’ve never been trained for anything and I have no parlour tricks.”

The last sentence was like a comment upon his own impression of her. He was struck by her effect of uselessness in any particular direction. It was a weakness, but he could not deny that it was also a charm. Since the war, the efficient young woman had been as much in evidence as the inefficient young man, and it was a relief to come upon a girl who seemed to take and enjoy life as a gift. She ought to have things made easy for her.

It was a great pity, he thought, that the Woodruffs could not buy Moorend. Sitting there with his pipe, in easy conversation, with the September sun gilding the brown books in the shabby room, where everything looked worn by happy use, and there was no attempt to live up to the fashion of the moment, he was only now beginning to feel the geniality as distinct from the dignity of the place. A very little money would make it an ideal home, and Miss Woodruff was its ideal occupant.

Her father, he remembered, had been the first of

his family to live there ; but she might have been the descendant of a long line of dwellers in the house. Or, rather, in her effect of uselessness, of no ties with the present, she might have been the dweller there for many generations.

He asked her if she had lived at Moorend all her life ; and she said that she had, except for visits to her aunts in London, and during the war, when Martin had been in France, and she had worked as ward-maid at the Barstow Hospital. No, she hadn't gone in for nursing ; she wouldn't be any good at it.

His remarks about the war, and the changes which had followed, brought out in her a curious indifference. She didn't seem to have noticed the changes ; and, anyhow, they didn't matter. People were the same, and the days were the same. The only thing was that you needed more money. Yet her life did not appear to be isolated. She went into Barstow and Cleeve often with Martin, and sometimes Lady Kelmseot asked her over to Stoke, where she met plenty of people.

"But don't worry about me," she said, in a tone which, though light, forbade further questions ; "tell me about you. How do you do architecture ?"

"By feel," he said, putting into words the culmination of his experiences that afternoon.

She nodded interestedly, but asked him to explain.

"I mean," he said, giving himself up to a listener who seemed to supply some want in himself, "that you've got to get it right in your bones. All the rest is tape and trimmings—calculation. You go so, and so," he lurched with his broad shoulders,



and spread out his hands, as if supporting a weight ;  
“ you make a face like it.”

“ Like a child writing ? ”

“ Pretty much,” he agreed ; and then, frowning at past rather than present difficulties in making himself understood, he went on, “ People think you are clever, or know a lot, when you are straining your heart out just to let things do themselves. *That's* the difficulty ; to find out how they go. You see, when they built this house they were builders—actually builders ; we call ourselves builders because we're ashamed of being architects, of doing it on paper. It's an affectation—like artists calling themselves painters—but it shows where the shoe pinches. We don't know enough about things : bricks and stones, timber, steel, concrete ; and we don't stop long enough in one place to get the hang of the ground. *That's* half the battle. You ought to be able to whistle it up out of the ground. Of course you need to know all about styles, but that is only a confession that you don't know your job. You build in a particular style to conceal your ignorance. I would almost go so far as to say that the moment you begin to design you have chucked up the sponge.”

He spoke in a tone of great exasperation, unaware that he was getting off on her his accumulated impatience with other people ; relaxing himself like a man at home after keeping up a difficult part among strangers.

“ Now and then it comes off,” he went on. “ This Institute, for example. I don't know what your friend means by saying that it doesn't suit its

purpose, but this is how it was. When I saw the competition advertised, I came down for a fortnight and loafed about Cleeve Down, dipping down into Barstow at intervals to keep the connection. You see, the Institute was to stand on the hill where Barstow ends and Cleeve begins. Of course I knew Barstow by heart; I'm a Severnshire man. What the Institute was wanted for was all plain sailing; nobody but a fool could go wrong there. The real problem was to get Barstow and Cleeve to say 'Technical Institute' with one voice, and say it in harmony with the rest of both of them—different as they are; and for that it was necessary to get Cleeve into my bones, down to the very rocks. You can't begin to throw your weight about——”

He was interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Dando, who said: “If the gentleman wants to catch the five-twenty, he'd better be thinking of going.”

“Oh, can't you——?” began Miss Woodruff; but Wedmore had come to himself—or out of himself. The unresolved question was queerly mixed up with his hurried farewell, which haste made warmer and more familiar than it would have been otherwise. Yes, yes, he would bring the Pumphreys out to Moorend. Miss Pumphrey was devoted to music—a musician, a singer, herself.

## CHAPTER V

MOOREND wouldn't do, thought Wedmore, as he hurried through the now dusky Valley of Rocks on his way to the station. His brain cleared by rapid walking, he had got down to the bottom reason why it wouldn't do which the honesty of his nature demanded—though it was a reason which implied an absurd weakness in himself. The unfitness for Hilda of a place which would, no doubt, attract her sentimentally, if he gave her a chance to see it, was a good enough ostensible reason; and in his survey of the house he had not been too distracted to make precise observations to support it, and he would certainly employ them for all they were worth; but the real reason was nothing more or less than Miss Woodruff.

That she had to leave Moorend in any case made no difference. For ever and for ever, for him, Moorend was and would be Miss Woodruff; and to live there, even after she had gone in the flesh, would be to risk the worst kind of infidelity—that of the imagination. If she had been a ghost, her possession of Moorend could not be more secure.

Wedmore had nothing whatever, in word or look, to reproach himself with in his conduct that afternoon; all things considered, he had borne himself

remarkably well ; but he knew, though he did not understand, the obscurities of his own nature, and the dangers to peace of mind which lurked in them. Once let a woman get involved in them, and you never knew where you were.

He had, or thought he had, no illusions about love. There was love, undoubtedly, emphatically ; and there was—the Lord knew what, except that it wasn't what the moralists called lust, which took you in the blood and mixed with all your aspirations. Let alone his own experience, the newspapers were full of it. Remembering, with grim amusement, Mrs. Dando's omission of " young " before " gentleman," after an interval for reflection, and her anxiety for him to catch his train, Wedmore surmised that the good woman, with her young mistress at heart, was perfectly well aware of the dangers which lurked in such encounters. Evidently he had been less guarded in his manner than he thought—or, perhaps, he had been too guarded.

Incidentally, he was glad that the haste of his departure had made him forget to borrow one of Woodruff's books. He meant to read one, but it would be better to get it from the circulating library in Barstow.

The same honesty which made Wedmore see the real reason why Moorend wouldn't do, made him see the reason why he must tell the Pumphreys that he had been there. It was, again, Miss Woodruff. But for her, and her unholy though innocent power over his imagination, he need not speak of a place that he had already decided against—which, too, on reflection, might well be beyond the generosity of his future father-in-law's intentions.

Not to speak of it now would be truckling to fear. He would have to tell the Pumphreys, with whom he was dining that evening, but it would be perfectly easy to dwell upon the practical shortcomings of Moorend: rooms too small and too dark, no facilities for golf, and remoteness from Hilda's friends in Cleeve. He would still be concealing the real reason why Moorend wouldn't do, but that was a matter for private compunction at his own weakness rather than public honesty about his actions.

As, about two hours later, Wedmore sat on top of the tram which, picking him up at his lodgings in Upper Ann Street, Barstow, bore him through the increasing dignity of Cleeve to the nearer end of the great bridge, one of the wonders of the world, which he must cross on foot to reach the residence of the Pumphreys, clinging like a swallow's nest to the opposite wooded cliff, he repeated his assertion that there were good things in Cleeve: Georgian things, and a semi-Italian style which the climate almost justified. The Pumphreys, themselves, were lately of Cleeve. The tram, indeed, in its full journey, sketched out their ascent from Barstow to Cleeve, though it paused, respectfully, at their translation—from Cleeve to almost "county."

Old John Pumphrey, Sir John's father, had lived snug and low in Maundy Square, a fashionable quarter in the days of Royal Anne, but now degenerated into common lodgings, almost in sight of his vessels as they crawled to port from West Indian voyages in the palmy days of the sugar trade.

Young John, on his marriage, had moved up to a debatable suburb, Cleeve in aspiration, but postally

Barstow ; and only as Sir John, after Mayoralty, had he migrated into unquestionable Cleeve. His translation across the bridge was less than three years old ; and it was his engagement of Wedmore, following their acquaintance over the Institute, to enlarge his house, in the colonial style, on the further cliff, which had led up to Wedmore's engagement to his elder daughter.

From Riverside you could look far down into Maundy Square on the opposite shore ; so that the slow zig-zag of the tram through Barstow to the topmost terrace of Cleeve represented the toilsome ascent of the Pumphreys in fact which imagination could leap at a bound.

The high-swung bridge, as Wedmore crossed it, thrilling under his feet, might have been the path of ambition which had opened up after his winning the competition for the Institute and engagement to Hilda Pumphrey. With the first he had gained professional reputation, and with the second he had exchanged the mere certainties of talent and industry for the enchanting possibilities of influence.

Not that the love between him and Hilda was tainted with ambition. It was a fairy-tale ; as much a fairy-tale as the blue gulf below him now, with its twinkling lights and hollow reverberations from cliff to cliff as the steamers nosed their way up the muddy channel ; but it was associated with bold ventures and the noise of popularity. He could keep his head in these incidental consequences of his love. Also—and at this he thanked God—his love for Hilda had lifted him above the muddy channel of his own desires.

At this height, and on his way to the wide rooms of her father's house, where honourable success was openly displayed, he could laugh at his dark disturbance of the afternoon. Behind him, beyond the furthest rim of the clotted city, lurked Moorend, with its appeal to the unknown within him; in front was the bright home of understanding love and intelligent design. In his exalted mood Wedmore was prepared to distrust the queer promptings of his body which had gained him early distinction in his calling; to kick down the ladder of his professional ascent.

Come to think of it, his interrupted conversation had been not only an unworthy complaint against the conditions of his present prosperity, but a dangerous disclosure; even to the ignorant one shouldn't blab the secrets of strength. . . .

When he came to Hilda, where she awaited him in an open loggia overlooking the gulf, it was the more passionate side of his love for her which broke suddenly through their greeting.

"*Must* we wait for this blessed opening?" he murmured thickly, as he strained her to him.

"Of course; why not?" she said, with pretended matter-of-factness, holding her head away.

"So many things might happen."

"Who's afraid? Nothing can happen. Besides, *I* don't want to wait. It is my father's wish. 'This blessed opening' means a lot to him; he likes to do things with *éclat*." After a moment she added, with eyes down, plucking at his coat: "Will not the knowledge that *I* am impatient enable you to bear it?"

“Darling!” he murmured, with her hand to his lips.

Hilda gave so much in words that passion was called to order. Nevertheless, as they stood there for a few minutes in the deepening dusk, he continued to press in words for an earlier marriage. Quite suddenly, the idea of waiting for the opening of the Institute appeared to him foolish and unnecessary. Hilda, however, was quite sure that her father would not hear of any change of date; he was proud of Wedmore, and he wanted to claim him publicly; and she begged Wedmore not to disturb him by appearing dissatisfied.

In the better light of the drawing-room Hilda Pumphrey showed herself to be a tall, firmly-built, sanguine young woman, with hair like bronze in both colour and form, and an expression that was at once proud and good-humoured. Her eyes had been called sea-green, and her lips, cut with the clearness of an Egyptian carving, were generally parted in a slightly protesting smile, as at a world and a fortune too good to be true. Intense vitality of mind and body was evident in her looks and movements; and, when her smile deepened, a dimple appeared in the firm whiteness of either full cheek below the red. She had the chest of a singer. The colour of her heavy gown, worn easily from the shoulder, was concentrated in a chain and pendant of green jade.

Hilda crossed the room to her mother, and discharged upon her the full warmth of a kiss, inspired by her lover, but experienced by him as a promise rather than a fulfilment. He, watching the action



so frankly—almost ostentatiously—performed, had no reason to complain. The most blessed thing about Hilda, indeed, was her candid promise of a capacity for passion when opportunity should be ripe.

Lady Pumphrey, who sat by the empty hearth, a homely habit she had retained through all their migrations, returned her daughter's kiss with quiet affection, and held out her hand to Wedmore with, "Well, James?" She was a thin, dark, anxious though not unhappy-looking woman, as if she viewed with slight apprehension the success which her daughter hailed with courage. When she smiled, however, one saw that the apprehension was, equally, humorous.

The long room, lit by concealed electric bulbs above the cornice, and a little aware of its own proportions, was furnished rather sparingly but expensively with exclusively modern pieces in precious woods, with a notable absence of upholstery. A few bright cushions were placed with evident intention, as were the flowers; and the pictures, including two little panels of single figures in landscape by Mr. Augustus John, bespoke a discriminating selection from the New English Art Club. In these considered surroundings, Lady Pumphrey, in her black lace gown, looked rather like a nervous passenger sitting by her luggage.

While the three were talking about Hilda's golf that afternoon, Sir John came bouncing in.

"*Here*—you are, then!" he said, beginning on a high note and ending on a low one, with a slight pause in the descent, as if for rapid observation.

His prominent eyes gleamed for a moment behind his gold-mounted pince-nez in support of this idea. But the greeting was so characteristic of him that Wedmore, to whom it was addressed, did not take it to mean, necessarily, that Sir John had been looking for him that afternoon, though it was not unlikely.

Wedmore shook the limp, warm hand which contrasted oddly with Sir John's brisk movement in holding it out, but deferred his account of himself; and Sir John asked no questions about his movements.

Sir John Pumphrey was a stoutish man of about sixty; bald, but with a closely-trimmed, very strongly-growing dark beard, the wiry curves of which, compared with his daughter's hair, supported the theory that the reddish type is only a "sport" of the black. In other respects, Hilda was emphatically her father's daughter; though the vigour which in her was graceful was in him exuberant. He moved with short, quick steps, his pointed shoes twinkling in response to his eyes. As usual, he carried a small black portfolio of papers, and he crackled.

He was followed almost immediately by his only son, Harry; a neat, though stoutish young man with a waxed moustache and the look of a major which he had retained from the Army Service Corps after demobilisation. Harry greeted Wedmore with a smile and blink of infinite sagacity.

Compared with the bustling energy of the father, and the cultivated quietness of the son, Wedmore's look and manner gained distinction. His features, of a healthy pallor, were both solid and cleanly cut,

combining strength with delicacy, and his hazel eyes were steady in their glance. He looked older than his years, and when he appeared in evening clothes people often glanced instinctively—though in vain—at his left lapel for a scrap of ribbon.

## CHAPTER VI

DINNER was well begun, and Polly, a lean, black-browed girl of nineteen, the only other member of the family, had slipped into her place between her father and brother with, "Sorry, dad; cheerio, Jim!" before Wedmore broached the subject of his afternoon's excursion.

"I went out to Moorend this afternoon," he said quietly to the table at large.

"Moorend, Moorend," said Sir John judiciously; and then, interestedly, "Oh, yes?"

"It's to be sold," said Wedmore.

"No!" said Sir John, his fork arrested; and Hilda said, "What, what?"

"Moorend, Moorend, where Guy Woodruff lived," said Sir John to her in a rapid, impatient undertone; and then, to the world, "Preposterous! The Kelmscots have no conscience!"

Steadied rather than disconcerted by the effect of his information, Wedmore went on, "By auction, by Till and Sapperton, at the end of November."

"We must have it," said Sir John quietly but emphatically, and drank wine. Then, drawing his napkin across his lips, he added, with a comically shrewd glance at Wedmore, "The Woodruffs won't buy, I suppose?"

"I gather that they can't," said Wedmore; "but I only saw Miss Woodruff."

"Who else is there?" said Hilda.

"A brother," said Wedmore, pleased at the natural way in which Miss Woodruff was being relegated to her proper place in the story as a mere incident; "a composer. He, by the way, plays the organ at Saint Michael's."

"Oh?" said Sir John, in a slightly injured tone, as if to say, "Why wasn't I told before?" and Hilda, turning round to Wedmore, murmured almost incredulously, "*Your Saint Michael's!*"

Wedmore could not help feeling a little amused. The Pumphreys, even Hilda, had always regarded it as the amiable weakness of a kind of artist that he should lodge in Barstow in preference to Cleve. Except for business, they avoided Barstow. Now he could see both Hilda and her father making respectful mental note of the church which they had, so far as he knew, never entered.

"Yes, and he has written a Choral Symphony about it," he said mischievously.

"Listen to him!" groaned Hilda at the intellectual feast so grudgingly spread; and Polly said, "Jim's had a day out!"

Sir John rapped the table with both hands for attention. "Can he be got at—to make an appointment?" he said; and Wedmore said that Woodruff had a room for his pupils somewhere in Cleve.

"Jim ought to write to Miss Woodruff," said Hilda with, as Wedmore knew, no intention but to remind her father of the courtesies.

"I don't think it's necessary," Wedmore said, looking at her with a sort of compunction; "there is certain to be somebody to show you round."

"Oh, but, my dear fellow," said Sir John reproachfully, "the Woodruffs are the Woodruffs. . . . Telephone book, Bessie!" he chanted to the maid, without looking at her.

The maid flew.

"Here you are," said Sir John, when he had got the book. "Woodruff, Martin, Teacher of Music, 504, Cleeve, 17, Acacia Road." He clapped the book together and, still holding it between his palms, said to his wife, "Now, when? To-morrow afternoon?"

"Yes," said Lady Pumphrey in a tone of resignation.

"And you, Hilda?"

"Rather!"

"And you?"

Wedmore nodded, though he had for a moment questioned if it were necessary for him to go, and Polly said:

"Where do I come in?"

Nobody thought it necessary to answer her, and Sir John, his palms flat on the table, went on,

"Very well, then. Hilda, you telephone to Mr. Woodruff to-morrow morning at half-past ten—not earlier—with my compliments, asking him if it will be convenient for us to look at Moorend after-luncheon. If you can't get on to him, send a reply-paid wire to Woodruff, Moorend, Upton, to the same effect."

"Also with compliments," murmured Polly to her brother.

“Chut!” said her father indulgently, and added to Wedmore, in the brisk undertone of man to man, “We’ll pick you up at two-thirty.”

Then they all sat back, as after business done, and Harry went through the pantomime of wiping his brow.

Diverted from his intention of pointing out the weakspots in Moorend by finding Sir John “all over it,” as he phrased it to himself, Wedmore, nevertheless, felt compelled to make an attempt, and he began,

“I hope you won’t be disappointed——”

“I know, I know,” chanted Sir John gaily, as one humouring a too-diffident child; “there’s always *something*. But Moorend is Moorend.”

“*And* the associations as well,” said Hilda luxuriously.

“Who, by the way, was Woodruff?” said Wedmore, who felt the need of some enlightenment before he got on with his report. “I never heard of the man.”

“But, my dear fella, Woodruff wasn’t a man, he was a *cult!*” cried Sir John, at a high pitch. “*Tell him, Hilda!*” he added, in a deep tone of scornful geniality.

“Oh, Woodruff can’t be *told*, father,” said Hilda, with an encouraging glance at her lover, who, though bewildered, was not in the least disconcerted at his ignorance; “and *anybody* might be excused for not having heard of him. You don’t hear of Woodruff; you find him—or he finds you; and then you are one of his, or else you can make nothing of him, and lose your temper, like George the Third with

Blake. Barstow," she slightly emphasised the word, as if to distinguish it from Cleeve, "never made anything at all of Woodruff."

She went on to give the names of some of Woodruff's books, saying that she had one or two of them, and described their general character; and Sir John, who didn't seem to have read the books, intoned, "Good, good!" at intervals, and threw in scraps of local opinion of Woodruff as a man. It all chimed in remarkably with what Miss Woodruff had said about her father, and Wedmore began to feel that his susceptibility to the daughter of such a man was almost excusable. When Hilda paused for breath, Harry said, "Go up one"; and Polly, who had been watching Wedmore sympathetically, said, "So now you know!"

"But," said Hilda, with a good-humoured grimace at the pair across the table, "what I am dying to know is how he comes out in his children."

"The son seems to be a bit of a genius," said Wedmore.

"And she?" chanted Sir John, with his elbows on the table, as he felt a peach.

Wedmore described Miss Woodruff to the best of his ability. He found himself speaking of her without any embarrassment now that the subject of Moorend had been so enlarged. His present feeling towards her was resentful, as to a person who had let him down—or nearly; though he could not have said how. Whether or not his resentment appeared in his face, Lady Pumphrey, who spoke little but listened and watched attentively, said vaguely, as from the deeps of memory,



“Wasn't there——?”

“Woodruff and the late Lord Kelmscot were bosom friends, my dear,” said Sir John pointedly, as if that answered the unfinished question.

“Miss Woodruff spoke affectionately of Lady Kelmscot,” said Wedmore, with no purpose but to please.

His only mistake with the Pumphreys had been an indefiniteness about social shades. When he made his formal application for Hilda, he had said truthfully that his father was a farmer; but it came out afterwards that his father was a farmer of the condition often qualified by “gentleman”; was, in fact, younger brother to the holder of an old baronetcy. Sir John, while appreciating the fact, had never quite forgiven its omission by Wedmore. For one thing, it a little obscured his own indifference to rank in the enlightened recognition of talent and character; and, for another, as he intimated with friendly jocularly, Wedmore's carelessness in dress, and the speech and manners of some of his associates—his partner, for example—might easily have led one astray.

“Still,” said Hilda, as if in appreciation of Wedmore's last remark, “you didn't like her.”

“Not very much,” he said with truth, since he had been afraid of Miss Woodruff.

“Ah, you must read Woodruff,” said Hilda sagaciously; “I *think* you'll tumble.”

“All the same,” said Wedmore, who felt rather irritably that he was not being given a chance to make a faithful report, “you can't live in literary associations.”

“Stout fellow!” said Harry. “Give me a flat in town and a bungalow in Surrey.”

“Oh, we know that you are a ruthless modernist,” said Hilda to Wedmore, ignoring her brother, “but you must make *some* concessions to sentiment.”

“That is not putting it quite fairly, my dear girl,” said Sir John, in his gravest tones, as he peeled a walnut. “There is the question of responsibility. Putting aside literary associations, such places as Moorend are a trust. We, who have nothing but the fruits of our own industry and enterprise, owe it to the old order to preserve the memorials of their prime. They served their generation well, on the whole; and, in a sense, we have supplanted them. Supposing, for example, Moorend fell into the paws of a fellow like Stuckey. Why, he would pull it down as soon as look, or, at any rate, build up to the very doors. If I remember rightly, he is building in that direction already.”

At this there was a little scuffle between Harry and Polly. Stuckey was the contractor who was building the Institute, and there was what Harry called a “cub Stuckey,” in whom Polly was accused of being interested. Wedmore could not hear what was said, but he had the feeling that, unlike the others, Polly had observed that he was trying to put them off Moorend. More than once he had caught her looking at him thoughtfully. Polly was an engaging child, but she was inconveniently sharp. He saw that he had said as much as he ought in disparagement of Moorend; anything more would create misunderstanding.

Hilda’s use of the word “modernist” had warned

him that they were at cross-purposes ; and he was a little shocked to reflect that he had got into the habit of accepting the name without protest in order to avoid the discussion of his more personal aims and ideals. Was it, indeed, Hilda that he had at the back of his mind when he slopped-over, as he phrased it, that afternoon ? At any rate, if he could not give the real reason why Moorend wouldn't do, he ought not to multiply others.

Incidentally, Wedmore observed that, with his translation from Cleeve, Sir John was mellowing. His civic record, culminating in the gift of the Technical Institute, had been one of progress at all costs. Now he seemed to be feeling a sort of inverted *noblesse oblige*.

When the ladies were well out of the room, Sir John said, with the alacrity of one who had been saving up a choice morsel,

“What my wife was thinking about was that Woodruff ran away with a woman, the wife of an Oxford don.”

Wedmore was amused at Sir John's consideration for his daughters. Judging from her general attitude to authors, if Hilda read Woodruff she would know all about his life. As for Polly—Wedmore guessed that Polly could astonish her father.

“Then was the gallant musicker born on the wrong side of the blanket ?” said Harry, helping himself to port.

“Oh dear, no,” said Sir John ; “everything was in order. The case was undefended, but there was nothing disgraceful about it—rather romantic. Lord Kelmscot's name came into it in the newspapers on

account of his friendship with Woodruff and knowledge of the petitioner. Lord Kelmscot was rather a queer fish; there are many stories about him. However, *de mortuis*. . . Woodruff's marriage was a very happy one; so happy that—if you understand me—his work has been called unhealthy. As you fellows know, I am not a great reader of fiction, though I follow the reviews; but the impression I have is of something rather—rather gamey, don't you know. Distinctly *recherché*. You must get Hilda to choose one of Woodruff's novels for you; she has been brought up to take a charitable view of the artistic temperament. My only personal contact with Woodruff was when I wrote to him, as the most prominent literary man in the neighbourhood, inviting him to attend a meeting of our Library Committee. His reply, though polite, struck me as ironical. He did not come."

Wedmore was left with the impression that Sir John Pumphrey's main reasons for wanting Moorend were as irrelevant as his own reasons for deciding that it wouldn't do must have appeared to a detached observer. Allowing for the speaker, what Sir John had said did, however, agree with his own feeling about the place. "Unhealthy" was, perhaps, too harsh a word for the atmosphere, but it would have to serve. Certainly the attraction of Miss Woodruff might be described as morbid—particularly in comparison with the attraction to which he owed his loyalty.

Sir John went on to ask him pertinent questions about the condition and possibilities of the place; questions in which his capacity as a man of business

was evident enough. Whatever his reasons for wanting Moorend, he had made up his mind to try for it; and he gave what seemed to Wedmore good reasons for assuming that the bidding would not be very keen, and that Moorend would go for a moderate price. Land was land; but the house itself would be regarded as a white elephant by the sort of person who wanted land for suburban building.

Sir John had not seen Moorend for a good many years, but he seemed to have a clear memory of its features and situation. In spite of what he had said about Stuckey's vandalism, he pointed out that the depression in which the house was planted was, in itself, a protection of privacy—supposing the surrounding land were let and used for building purposes. Nobody could build up the Valley of Rocks.

During this conversation, uninteresting to him, Harry excused himself to go to his club in Cleve. When Sir John and Wedmore rejoined the ladies, Wedmore, his more practical intellect awakened by the discussion, and his respect for Sir John restored, as it always was when they got down, as he would have said, to "brass tacks," felt that with his engagement he had indeed risen on stepping-stones of his dead self to higher things. Successful people, still comparatively new to him, had their foibles, but they saw clear.

In the larger discussion of Moorend, his disturbance of the afternoon appeared to him as nothing more than the defect of a temperament too nicely balanced between the practical and the artistic. Both the practical man and the artist—in the more

definite sense of the word—would have known how to deal with the experience in their respective ways. He suffered it, as he said, in the middle : between the response of the natural man to a pretty girl and the articulate reaction of the artist to atmosphere. If he could have put Miss Woodruff into a picture or a poem he could, so to speak, have laughed at her ; you couldn't get her into building, and therefore she disturbed the imagination.

Hilda sang, and her voice, a ringing soprano, round and true, completed Wedmore's remorseful recognition of his great good luck in being lifted by love into the region of conscious design ; away from the instinctive groping upon which he was, by temperament, too much tempted to rely. Though not a musician, Wedmore was keenly susceptible to sound ; if he had said that he built " by sound and feel," he would have given a more complete account of his inspirations when he slopped-over that afternoon. He wouldn't be surprised if young Woodruff turned out to be the real meaning of Moorend.

When Hilda sang, the barrier to understanding which he felt in talking to her entirely disappeared. Her singing not only enchanted him with its revelation of her brave and happy nature, but gave him ideas. He moved in cities which rose out of the ground easily at his command ; all his knowledge came to the surface of his mind and lent itself to the mood of the song, as if he designed at the will and for the delight of the singer.

## CHAPTER VII

SIR JOHN, who did nothing by halves, made it a holiday. The Daimler called for Wedmore, not at his office, but at his rooms in a beautiful though decayed early Georgian house whose existence was generally unsuspected by passers-by in the rather squalid street into which the trams turned sharply after ascending the hill where Wedmore had stopped to read the advertisement of Moorend. Tall iron gates between two small shops were the only indication from the street that the house was there. Through the gates you climbed steeply under an arch of sooty elders to come out upon a little lawn commanded by the serene front of the house, with a pilastered wooden porch where pigeons crooned under a tangle of jasmine.

The house, which had evidently been built for a merchant-adventurer in the palmy days of Barstow, on the hillside commanding the port, before the street below was planned, much less degenerated, was now occupied by the widow of a solicitor; and Wedmore had two panelled rooms on the first floor which gave him a clear view across the city to the hills beyond, with the tower of Saint Michael's as the most prominent object in the smoky foreground.

The exclamations with which Sir John Pumphrey

emerged from the sooty tunnel—he had insisted on coming up himself instead of sending the chauffeur to tell Wedmore that the car was at the gate below—indicated a new eye to the place, for he had been there before.

“My word, Jim!” he said, as Wedmore, called from the luncheon-table by his outcry, came out from the porch to meet him, “you have a nose for quarters. You and your Moorends!”

His roguish manner was, as Wedmore understood, to explain any apparent insensibility in the past of a busy man to his present surroundings on the grounds of Wedmore’s own affectation of ruthless modernism. As they stood for a moment on the lawn, looking up at the house, Sir John went on to confess a similar duplicity for family reasons: the women liked new houses and they could not put up with smoke; and Wedmore saw that, whether at the idea of securing Moorend, or from sheer mellowing on the edge of county, old Barstow had become rising stock in his future father-in-law’s estimation.

Sir John made him sit bodkin between the two ladies, while he himself, from beside the driver, threw back to them high-pitched comments on what they saw. Evidently it was to be a pious pilgrimage through the native city. Instead of taking the nearest way out, they followed the tram-lines down the hill. As they crossed the wide plain by the harbour, Sir John regretted loudly the removal of the old drawbridge.

“When I was a young man there were ships on both sides, Annie,” he said, oblivious of the fact that his wife was Barstow born and bred. “Never



get any time, nowadays, to look at the dear old place. There's the *County of Severnshire*, Hilda!" he cried, with a wave of his right arm, divided between regrets for the past and pride in his newest vessel.

The object of their détour was to pass under the tower of Saint Michael's. Sir John passed it every day, since his offices were in Corn Street, but he gazed up at it now with eager curiosity—recalling to Wedmore his own fresh interest, as a child, in the landscape at his door when somebody told him that an artist had been painting it. He could well understand that, for Sir John, the tower was redeemed by having been set to music. Not that Sir John was a connoisseur of music, but that he was—as, indeed, Wedmore knew to his advantage—the born patron. Wedmore hoped, incidentally, that young Woodruff would prove worthy of the interest he had excited in advance. In the holiday spirit which they all shared, he murmured to Hilda,

"Bet you all go to Saint Michael's next Sunday morning"; and Hilda, in the same spirit, pinched his arm. It was only lately that their terms had allowed a mild quizzing of her father; and Wedmore could not have said whether he had been previously restrained by regard for her filial affection or by uncertainty whether she shared her father's views.

In justice to Sir John, it must be said that, in this mood, he was a lively and interesting companion. He knew his Barstow, both past and present. It was only that residence in Cleeve had for a time altered his perspective, and caused him to conceal his knowledge. Now, emancipated from Cleeve, he

could afford to appreciate Barstow—as the saloon passenger may praise the steerage at the expense of second-class.

It could not be denied that his renewed appreciation of Barstow was whole-hearted rather than discriminating; and, as they left the city for the suburbs, and appreciation was exchanged for denunciation, he not infrequently denounced the wrong thing. There were some dignified memorials of the past on the London Road.

In twenty minutes or so they were at the turning to Moorend beyond the Valley of Rocks—upon which Hilda's comment in passing was “dinky”—and Wedmore saw that he had been right in assuming that the village, or hamlet as it turned out to be, was clustered at the corner. He saw, too, that Sir John had been right in saying that the lie of Moorend protected it from encroachments in the rear.

“You see, you see,” cried Sir John, waving his arm, “all we have to do is to plant a ring of trees, and they can do their damndest!”

They swung through the open gateway of what had once been a lodge, skirted the home farm, rounded the house, and then were scattering the hens upon the terrace.

“*Here*—we are!” said Sir John, and descended.

Mr. Woodruff was at the door to receive them. He was a slight, nervous young man of about thirty, darker than his sister, but with her grey eyes. He had a little black moustache. His tightly-buttoned shabby suit of black serge looked very much brushed-up for the occasion. He might have been taken for the assistant master of an elementary school.

Hilda, with her frank and slightly protecting air, as she stepped from the car, added to her father's introduction the information that she was the telephoner of the morning.

Woodruff smiled nervously, and murmured something inaudible; and his obvious admiration for Hilda at once commended him to Wedmore. To Wedmore he said: "My sister spoke of you," with a friendly gravity which, in comparison with his rather fluttered reception of the others, detached the pair a little, as if they were likely to find interests in common.

Wedmore did not know whether to be glad or sorry that Miss Woodruff did not immediately appear. He hoped, however, that she was not out, because it seemed a point of honour that Hilda should see her—though he could not have said exactly why. Certainly, in this gay descent upon Moorend in force, his misgivings of the previous afternoon seemed ridiculous, though the house itself was as potent as ever.

They spent a few minutes examining the front of the house, with delighted exclamations from Hilda and her father. Wedmore, however, could tell that these were more or less mechanical; that they had taken the place for granted from the first; that it was precisely the associations which attracted them.

When Miss Woodruff did appear, in the sitting-room, Wedmore felt in her manner the polite hostility with which he had greeted her. He put it down to their excessive numbers. This, he said to himself, was unreasonable, because Miss Woodruff had expected the family; and he resented it, not on his

own account—though it embarrassed him—but on that of Hilda, who was evidently attracted by the girl, and curious about her.

Having no comparison, Hilda, like her father, was entirely unaware that they were unwelcome; but Wedmore thought that Lady Pumphrey had received the same impression as himself, and attributed it to the same reason. She apologised conditionally to Miss Woodruff for the trouble they were giving; and it seemed to him that Miss Woodruff did not include her in her hostility. She smiled quickly, with a sad little twitch of her lips. When, in the kitchen, they encountered Mrs. Dando, Wedmore saw that she was in sympathy with her mistress. Her recognition of him he felt to be mildly scornful.

Sir John annexed Miss Woodruff with prancing gallantry, and led her through her house. There was nothing to show that he was not already the owner; and her quiet manner, though now good-humoured, played up to his. Hilda followed with Woodruff—who divided himself rather awkwardly between her and Lady Pumphrey, with Wedmore in the rear. Not, however, that Woodruff was not now at ease with Hilda; he was talking freely, in a quick staccato, and presently Wedmore gathered that Hilda had broached the subject of music. At a turn, she smiled and blinked at Wedmore the message, “See how I am drawing him out!”

From time to time Sir John called Miss Woodruff’s attention to some beauty of her house, appealing to Wedmore for the right name and description—“Yes, as I said, the chamfering”; and this use of Wedmore as an interpreter increased rather than

diminished the distance between him and Miss Woodruff which he had felt from the moment of her appearance. Beyond their greeting, formal on her part and apologetic on his, they had hardly exchanged words. If he had attempted liberties with her yesterday, he could not have been more embarrassed or she more coolly reserved.

Wedmore felt that he was looking glum; and he could see that Hilda, entirely unsuspecting of the cause, was aware of his discomfort. She made more than one attempt to bring him and Miss Woodruff together, breaking off her conversation with Woodruff and looking at Wedmore with questioning eyebrows and a protesting smile. Evidently she was vexed at his want of manners. At one point she cried to Miss Woodruff, with a smile of adorable friendliness, "He thinks I'm not good enough for Moorend!"

Sir John's comfortable "Ha, ha!" deep down in his chest covered the need for any protest from Wedmore, but he felt himself colour. He had not been thinking anything of the sort; he had been thinking, rather, that he was not good enough for Hilda. How much better, for example, was her open interest in Woodruff than his own sneaking—what?—for Woodruff's sister! But the moment Hilda said the words he wished she had not, because, in a sense, they were true; though "not good enough" was not a fair description of "unsuitable."

The momentary flash in Miss Woodruff's eyes, when Hilda said the words, convinced him that she did not want Hilda to live there; and her statement yesterday that she thought she should like *him* to

buy the house, only made him more resentful to her now. He could sympathise with her discomfort under Sir John's noisy appreciation of her house, but she was a fool to mix up Hilda with her father.

## CHAPTER VIII

IT was at Woodruff's invitation rather than his sister's that the party stayed for an early cup of tea. Wedmore felt it to be a mistake, but he could understand Woodruff's desire to see more of Hilda; and if, as was not unlikely, the young man saw some professional advantage in the acquaintance, Wedmore was quite ready to give him a helping hand.

He had to admit, too, that though Miss Woodruff had not taken the initiative, the moment she stood in the relation of hostess, her manner, though not effusive, left nothing to be desired in civility. He was old enough to think it natural, and not in itself a reflection upon Hilda, that Miss Woodruff should seem more kindly disposed to Lady Pumphrey than to any other member of the party. Young women, he supposed, would need to take each other's measure; but the young woman who did not respond to Lady Pumphrey at once must be difficult indeed.

During tea, which they had in the sitting-room, Sir John walked about with his cup in his hand and made appropriate remarks upon the books. He was widely if not well read, in the manner of a late comer to the habit who tried to keep up with the times; so that he was as familiar with the reprinted

old as with the new. His talk reflected the literary weeklies and the centenary celebration of the moment in the world of letters.

The books in Woodruff's library were mostly old, and they did not seem to have been added to since his death. Indeed, even Wedmore, who was anything but a reader of old or new, had been struck by the lack of any evidence of literary tastes in the present occupants of Moorend. There were no novels, and not even any magazines or reviews lying about, though this, apparently, was the room in which brother and sister spent most of their time. To have called it a drawing-room would have been absurd; it was much more like a study; but the only signs of any studies pursued there were the pedal piano and the music. Yet, though their responses to Sir John were often wide of the mark, the Woodruffs did not strike Wedmore as being, like himself, illiterate; and he supposed it to be a case of having lived so much in a literary atmosphere that the small change of the subject was not ready.

He tried not to make the comparison which lurked at the back of his mind; but, listening to Sir John, and remembering past attempts to improve himself, he could not deny that the Woodruff way was the more comfortable to an unbookish person. It was all part of the insidious attraction of Moorend. Everything was taken for granted.

The small portrait in water-colour of a beautiful woman, in an obscure corner over the bureau, which he had hardly taken in yesterday, he supposed to represent the late Mrs. Woodruff. Now that he had heard her story, everything suggested that the



Woodruffs, though not technically love-children, were so by temperament and training; and that would help to account for their effect of understanding without intellectual effort.

What Wedmore had been fearing came when Sir John, putting down his cup, made some rather flowery reference to Guy Woodruff. Miss Woodruff might resign herself humorously to Sir John's discussion of her house, but she was not likely to submit to being drawn about her father. Even her brother, who, though quite well-bred, was almost excessive in his nervous anxiety to please, winced perceptibly at the allusion.

"Yes," he said quickly, bringing his heels together with a quaintly military effect, "my father was an author, but he was not a very successful author."

Hilda, who, though naturally frank, was not impervious to irony, looked uncomfortably at her father at the word "successful"; but he exclaimed at his highest pitch:

"*An* author, *an* author! Do you hear that, Hilda? Why, my dear sir, he was *Woodruff*—I drop the title advisedly," dropping his voice at the same time. "Even in Barstow," he went on, taking the floor, "where, I grant you, we are more given to another sort of commerce than that with the muses, I could introduce you to some fervent Woodruffians."

"Yes, I know," said Woodruff, with his oddly staccato utterance, standing at attention with his cup in his hand; "my father was not without his appreciative readers. Won't you sit down?"

"But *do* you know, *do* you know?" cried Sir

John energetically, ignoring the invitation. "Why, Edward Anstruther said that he was the one true romantic of our day—what was it, Hilda?—'while others ran after her, she came to him, and murmured—and murmured——' I forget the exact words. I can quote Anstruther with the greater freedom in that, though I trust I am susceptible to the beauty of style, all my tastes lead me towards what somebody called the literature of information. As Wedmore, here, will tell you, I devote such powers as I have to the encouragement of clear thinking upon practical questions. If I had been privileged to meet your father—I gave him the opportunity—we should have had crows to pick, I warrant you!"

"Mr. Anstruther was very kind—I daresay you would," said Woodruff, with a little the effect of chattering teeth.

Miss Woodruff, as Wedmore could see, was very near to tears, and Lady Pumphrey, at any rate, knew it; though she probably attributed the cause to the inconvenient memory of a comparatively recent loss. She listened to her husband with her usual resignation, but her hands twitched in her lap, as if she refrained with difficulty from patting the girl beside her.

Hilda saved the situation beautifully by saying to Miss Woodruff, "Do *you* write?" thus avoiding an abrupt change of subject, but side-tracking her father.

"No," said Miss Woodruff, almost gratefully; and then, with an agitated rush, of explanation rather than protest, "I don't do anything."

The two girls went on talking for a few minutes,

with quick question and answer, as if to get each other's range ; and Wedmore could tell from Hilda's puzzled and interested expression that the same problem which, almost without his knowing it, had been exercising his mind was baffling her. What, exactly, *did* Miss Woodruff do ? What she said was, of course, only a figure of speech. Yet she did not give the impression of an idle person, and she was certainly not discontented. On the contrary, but for her disclaimers—which, yesterday, at any rate, had not been due to perversity—one would have taken her for a person happily absorbed in some congenial occupation of mind and body. Evidently what puzzled Hilda was the secret of her contentment.

The two girls, one bright and active and the other dark and passive, made an effective contrast, and Wedmore was glad to see them together. He wished that he had asked Hilda to come with him yesterday ; she had nothing to lose in an objective comparison.

As if in despair of making anything of Miss Woodruff, though not as if she felt rebuffed, Hilda turned to Woodruff, who at Sir John's instigation had been comparing war experiences with Wedmore, and asked him if he minded talking about his music.

“Not at all,” he said, with a flush of pleasure.

“My daughter sings,” put in Sir John, as if to explain her question.

“Yes, I know,” said Woodruff, with his quick, nervous smile. Remembering that he had told Miss Woodruff that Hilda was a singer, Wedmore was not surprised at the remark ; but Woodruff, colouring

slightly, went on with a stammer, "At least, I felt sure you did, when I heard your voice on the telephone this morning." Then, as if he had been too familiar, and with deepened colour, he added, "It is my business to notice voices. A soprano, is it not?"

"Yes; but how did you know?" said Hilda amusedly.

"By your throat," said Woodruff, with a quick, timid glance at the shapely region.

Hilda felt it pensively, her slightly raised brows and cool, amused eyes, as she did so, telling Wedmore, to his approval, that she was woman enough to enjoy the young man's bashful admiration of her person. Wedmore wished, in passing, that custom allowed men to speak their admiration without professional pretext. It would save a deal of morbid imaginings if one could say to a woman at first acquaintance, "You have beautiful hands."

Sir John suggested that Hilda should sing now; but, to Wedmore's relief, she quietly but emphatically declined, and Woodruff did not press her. Evidently he felt that the atmosphere was not sympathetic.

"No," said Hilda briskly, "I want Mr. Woodruff to tell us about his Choral Symphony. When is it going to be performed?"

"Ah," said Woodruff, "that is on the knees of the gods. It is not easy for an unknown composer to get an orchestral work performed."

Wedmore was struck by his freedom from self-consciousness in speaking of his own work. Evidently this young man was no amateur.

“Do you know Dr. Ingram?” said Hilda, naming the Cathedral organist and conductor of the Barstow Philharmonic Society.

“Yes,” said Woodruff with a laugh, “but I’m afraid he would put me down as rather a strayed lamb.”

“Ingram is an old stick-in-the-mud,” said Sir John, who, as Hilda evidently intended he should be, was interested.

“Dr. Ingram is a very good musician,” said Woodruff simply.

“Is it so very modern?” said Hilda, making great eyes.

“I don’t think so,” said Woodruff, rather at a loss. “In fact, I should say——”

“Martin hates Wagner and loves Mozart,” said Miss Woodruff quietly, entering into general conversation almost for the first time.

“I know what you mean *exactly!*” cried Hilda, turning to her with excessive gratitude for the remark. “Father, isn’t it exciting?”

“H’m, h’m,” said Sir John, pulling his beard with a rasping sound and wagging his toe, as if he chafed at sitting down.

“But in any case,” said Woodruff, who was evidently innocent of any idea of seeking advantage, “I hope to go to London when we leave Moorend.”

“Oh, but why London, my dear fellow?” said Sir John, rather sorely. “Barstow is not to be despised as a musical centre.”

“No, indeed,” said Woodruff cordially. “It is only that there are more opportunities for an unknown man in London.”

“That remains to be proved,” said Sir John darkly ; and Hilda blinked at Wedmore, and showed for a moment the tip of her tongue, which was her way of conveying the information that her father was nibbling at the bait she had exposed. She knew him too well to press her advantage now ; he must be left to think that he was the original discoverer of the morsel.

Miss Woodruff’s voluntary remark had brought her into the conversation at the right moment, and the slightly nervous alacritty with which they all turned to her showed that they had been feeling her silence, though, in spite of her resentment when Sir John spoke of her father, she did not appear to have been sulking. Miss Woodruff piqued curiosity by a detachment, remarkable at her age, which did not seem to be adopted ; so that she gave an impression of superior powers which was not borne out by anything she said. Yet she did not appear to be mentally lazy.

Watching her and Hilda, as they talked with Lady Pumphrey about the resources of the neighbourhood, Wedmore, though pleased at Hilda’s tactful management of a person whom he would not have called difficult yesterday, had the odd feeling that he ought to have warned her. Hilda was more than a match for Miss Woodruff in intelligence, as she was older in years ; but she was no match for her in something, below intelligence, which he could not name, though it was connected with his own occasional difficulties in conversation with Hilda ; difficulties which—as he now remorsefully recognised—he had got into the way of evading

by accepting such inaccurate descriptions as "modernist."

To say that Hilda was at the disadvantage of a good woman with a bad one would have been putting it too strongly ; the only badness he could attribute to Miss Woodruff was in the nature of her attraction for him—an attraction which he feared and resented as if it had been a prompting of the darker side of himself. It was, rather, like the disadvantage of a bright and generous visitor from a new country in contact with the representative of a very old civilisation.

Nor, as Wedmore saw now, was the effect of something very old and very ripe limited to Miss Woodruff. Her brother had it as well. As a man he attracted Wedmore ; he was modest and well-bred, and he had, moreover, a feminine delicacy which excited in the older man a protective instinct. Wedmore looked forward to some better opportunity for talking to Woodruff ; they would, though he did not dwell upon the implication, get on better without Hilda—though she was a musician and Wedmore was not—and he fancied that Woodruff would be glad of such an opportunity. From their first greeting there was a freemasonry between them—as if they could wait.

What it amounted to, and Wedmore was feeling it more and more, was that the Woodruffs not only went with Moorend and with all he had heard about their father and his works, but with some deep instinct in himself. There was a solidarity about Moorend in which part of him was involved, and what he gave to the Pumphreys was, by comparison, an official

loyalty—as if he had been lately naturalised in their camp. For the moment, the Pumphreys were in the ascendant; and they could well afford to be considerate to the people whose loss might be their gain; but the Woodruffs had the sinister advantage of a retreating army which has laid mines or poisoned the wells. Without blinking the fact of his own weakness, Wedmore was beginning to feel that his desire to put the Pumphreys off Moorend had been prompted by something more than self-protection—even in Hilda's interest.

Point was given to Wedmore's reflections by the fact that Sir John was now talking about the passing of the old order and the breaking-up of great estates. The Woodruffs, however, though they agreed as to the facts, appeared to regard them with equanimity. For Woodruff that was perhaps natural; he was absorbed in his music; but—and that brought up the problem again—what was Miss Woodruff absorbed in? Dislike of sympathy might account for her affectation of indifference at leaving Moorend; it was quite clear that she was not indifferent; but it would not account for the way she spoke about the place. When Sir John said something about the risk of building, she said quietly,

“I hope they will.”

For a moment Wedmore thought this was sheer perversity, but when Hilda exclaimed at the idea, Miss Woodruff said,

“It will make it more shut in.”

“But don't you feel your surroundings?” said Hilda curiously.

“No, I don't think so,” said Miss Woodruff with



a candid glance at her; "at least, there are surroundings and surroundings. There is always the day."

Hilda looked mystified, and Woodruff said,

"Beatrice is weather-wise."

"You are so fond of out-of-doors?" said Hilda encouragingly.

"Not specially," said Miss Woodruff, with a puzzled look. "I mean that, wherever you are, and even if things go wrong, and you come down on your moral uppers, there is always the sort of day it is. It is the same indoors as out. Nobody can alter it whatever they do, and nobody can keep you from enjoying it."

"But it isn't always weather like this!" said Hilda with a laugh of slight vexation.

"No, but there is always weather of some sort," said Miss Woodruff helplessly.

Hilda gave it up just as Wedmore was beginning to wonder if Miss Woodruff's advantage were not simplicity; that she baffled them because they were looking for something that wasn't there. Sir John, who had been listening with arms akimbo, had evidently come to the conclusion that she was a fool. He turned away abruptly and said to Woodruff, in the tone of one who had made up his mind:

"Well, sir, there's many a slip 'twixt eup and lip, but, if things go as I hope, you will at least have the satisfaction of knowing that Moorend is in good hands."

It was then that, almost for the first time, Miss Woodruff looked directly at Wedmore; a look so helpless, though not in the least confidential, that

he felt a sudden pity for her. It was followed by a wave of anger against his own weakness for putting her, mentally, in a relation in which the pity could not be indulged with safety. He shook hands with absurd formality, as if he had been asked for and had refused a loan, and walked out of the room feeling thoroughly ashamed.

When they were again in the car, Lady Pumphrey, for once, annoyed him by saying, as if summing up her impressions of the afternoon,

“That poor child is breaking her heart at leaving Moored.”

“Oh, I don’t know, mumsie,” said Hilda in the tone of one who wished to think otherwise; “she seems quite reconciled to the idea. . . . But,” she added, with the superior wisdom of the woman happily mated, “I don’t think she has found what she wants in life. A great pity to bring up girls without some definite occupation. I wish we could do something for her.”

It was in alarm at this prospect, and alarm on Hilda’s account rather than Miss Woodruff’s, that Wedmore said hastily,

“Miss Woodruff strikes me as quite capable of getting what she wants when she has decided what it is.”

“What puzzles me,” said Hilda, turning at the sharpness of his tone and looking at him amusedly, “is what on earth you and she found to talk about yesterday. You are never what I should call an expansive person, but to-day you were positively terrifying in your reserve. You really will have to cultivate the social graces, you know.”

Wedmore turned it off with a bantering reply, but the same thing had been puzzling him and making him uncomfortable. He had found it easy enough to talk to Miss Woodruff in a way that he could not use with Hilda; in a way which now betrayed to himself that for some time he had been bottling himself up. He had found Miss Woodruff a boon companion.

In his present mood he was prepared to turn the discovery to Hilda's advantage. You could not be slipshod with Hilda; you had to clarify your thoughts and express them to her in articulate language. Hilda was an intellectual discipline. Incidentally, he was glad of young Woodruff. If, as he hoped, the acquaintance improved, young Woodruff would act as a safe interpreter to Hilda of the sort of thing you found it easy to say to Miss Woodruff.

## CHAPTER IX

THOUGH neither he nor his guardians could interpret the signs, Wedmore's vocation had been declared from childhood. At a very early age he suffered rather than enjoyed a sense of balance and proportion which led him to misuse his toys and modify his games on principles which he couldn't explain but had to obey. His meals were apt to disagree with him unless he were allowed to arrange his cup and plate in an order of his own, and he quarrelled with his nursemaid every night over the folding and arrangement of his clothes. She could not see that cloth upon linen was a violation of Nature.

He had no musical talent, but he would spend hours with a drum, with mouth open and eyes bemused, beating out rhythms which anticipated the peculiarities of modern dancing. When, as often, he had a sick headache, he asserted that the reason was that the things in the nursery had been moved round the wrong way.

His moderate proficiency at books and games was governed by some instinct which defied explanation. He did not see, he felt how things ought to be done. This naturally led his preceptors astray, since they never knew whether he were stupid or

malingering. Occasionally he startled them; he would get a difficult sum right, apparently by making queer noises in his throat and jerking his head from side to side; and, before he had been taught the rules, he placed his "men" in orchard cricket more or less in the order which experience has adopted.

"Something mechanical" was the first suggestion for his future, and for a time he washed very clean and went about with a mincing gait under the impression that he would like to be a "civil engineer." But some work in the village broke into this dream, and he came home and said, "I want to be a builder." He used the word literally, and it was with a feeling of second-best for the sake of respectability that he consented to think of becoming an architect.

For a long time he did not seem to take much notice of the visible aspect of building, and he had to be encouraged to draw; but when he tumbled to the fact that what he felt in his bones could be demonstrated to the eye, and that its refinements worked out in what people called "styles," he began to "throw his weight about" on every scrap of paper he could lay hands upon. The phrase, of later acquisition, accurately described his feeling. Now that he could see, or, rather, feel the sense of them, his drawing and his mathematics quickly improved. As if he had discovered his centre of gravity, indeed, all his faculties were set free; and his last year at "Blunt's," the famous grammar school in his native county, left the legend of a brilliant but lazy boy who had bluffed everybody to avoid working for scholarships.

At the Architectural Association, where he spent

three years after leaving school, Wedmore had the reputation of a promising student who, however, could never be relied upon to do his best. His class-work did not seem to do justice to the powers which he displayed in improvisation. The truth was that Wedmore had already discovered a discrepancy in his own powers—comparable to that between head and heart, though he himself called it working in the top storey and working in the basement. He did not despise his training, but he had painfully to adapt it to what he felt, down below, before it was any good to him; and, as a rule, the task had to be finished before he had arrived at anything more than an unsatisfactory compromise.

From the Architectural Association he went to the Beaux Arts, where he succeeded in winning the Prix de Rome. That, while it immensely extended the resources of the top storey, didn't seem to do much for the basement; and he began to doubt if his instincts were not hindrances rather than helps to his professional capacity—particularly since, by this time, they had more than once led him astray in conduct. He was not dissolute, but he was unable to realise himself on paper; and, disillusioned by his amatory experiences, he envied poets and painters who could embody woman in their work as an architect could not.

For in his passion there was always a vocational impulse; even if he got drunk it was in pursuit of a plastic idea, to recover rather than to lose the moral, mental and physical equilibrium which seemed to be upset by his professional progress.

Always, in the professional success, the centre of

gravity seemed to be left outside ; and, presently, encouraged rather than hindered in the belief by the nonsense his more ostensibly artistic companions, the poets and the painters, talked about self-expression, and the means they took for the purpose, he came to the conclusion that the only way for an architect to make good was to leave himself behind ; to design in the top storey and pay no heed to the stirrings and whimperings in the basement.

When war broke out, Wedmore was at work, "moving about in worlds not realised," in the office of a titled Royal Academician, and it took him some time to recognise that the interruption of his career, though theoretically vexatious, was a relief in fact. He hated the idea of war, but he found in it many things to his purpose : the support of noise ; inspiring him to construct out of sound, so that when a barrage left off he felt short of material ; the sense of danger, the actual hardships of cold, hunger and fatigue. They helped him to realise himself. Particularly the noises. They shut him in with himself. He lived in a cell of quiet in the centre of organised noises ; he could, so to speak, hear himself think against them, as the deaf are said to hear against thunder, or a canary will sing loudest when the children are romping.

Altogether, he found that his experiences did not correspond to any of the descriptions of what he ought to feel. His comrades accepted the war philosophically, but groused at the conditions ; he cursed the war, but secretly enjoyed the conditions.

This made him ashamed, as evidence of a brutality hitherto concealed by lack of opportunity ; and

there were times when he wondered if he had not mistaken his vocation ; but when in cold blood he faced the idea of remaining in the army, he found that his instinct for an order derived from the nature of things revolted against mechanical discipline. He could adapt himself to the discipline—or, rather, from his point of view, indiscipline—but, again, only by leaving himself behind.

The opportunity of the Institute came almost immediately after he was demobilised. For once, the powers of the basement, aroused by the war, played into the hands of the designer in the top storey ; and, before Wedmore had put pencil to paper, he felt inwardly convinced that, barring the accident of incompetent assessors, he would win the competition. Then came success, and his introduction to Sir John Pumphrey. All the circumstances combined to establish a liking between the two men which might not have existed if they had met in cooler blood—as high temperatures will promote fusion between substances which are not really compatible. Wedmore was grateful to Sir John for having given him this opportunity, and Sir John was grateful to Wedmore for having made his gift to Barstow a shining example to the most critical eye.

Sir John carried off Wedmore to dinner at Riverside to discuss the improvement of his new house, and when Hilda appeared she seemed to Wedmore the incarnation of the spirit in which he had risen to his opportunity—as she was, indeed, the incarnation of her father's idea of success : brave, intelligent and humorous, too sure of her own advantages to ape the attractions of a different type or order. She



was the new spirit, proud of her newness, and eager to take up the challenge on behalf of enlightened plutocracy.

Within three weeks Hilda and Wedmore were engaged, her father's consent being all the more enthusiastic in that Wedmore's brains were his only fortune. The engagement had the right touch of daring, of "hang the expense," which befitted the Pumphrey reputation. They could afford to take risks which a more effete family might have questioned. As, in a moment of expansion, Sir John admitted to Wedmore, there could be little doubt that the name was a corruption of "Pomfret," but he was too proud to claim descent from Norman blood. His motto was, "We start afresh"—leaving the goal to be imagined.

The times were ripe, indeed, for the Pumphrey notions of success. With fortunes made by the war, and himself the man of the moment under Sir John's energetic patronage, Wedmore found himself bombarded with commissions; and Sir John had little difficulty in persuading him to set up his office in Barstow.

Wedmore took as his partner a young quantity surveyor named Roberts, who had served with him in France; a Cockney with the arithmetical conscience which Wedmore lacked. Roberts had no ideas, but unlimited faith in Wedmore; his function, as he said, was to check results after Wedmore had done throwing his weight about—it was from him that Wedmore caught the phrase—and to say "napoo" when necessary.

The two set about spoiling the Egyptians, as they

called it, in a spirit of adventure with professional ideals as well as personal profit in view. To engineer a respectable design out of showy aspirations was an amusing game in itself, and there were public schemes in the air which would afford the more serious opportunities which both, in their different ways, had at heart and had discussed in the trenches.

Apart from the neighbourhood of Hilda, and the almost necessity of watching the Institute in progress, Wedmore liked Barstow. Not only was it the metropolis of his county, the "dim rich city" of his youth, but it was essentially a city which had grown with a single eye to material prosperity, lacking the self-conscious look of a home of culture; though, for all that—or, he surmised, because of it—there had been embodied in its growth, at any rate up to the middle of the nineteenth century, a history of good building. Wedged in between the shops of its narrow dirty streets you would find Gothic, half-timber, Queen Anne or Georgian, all the more inspiring for their look of being taken for granted, without pious preservation, because they still served their purpose; and the churches, culminating in Saint Michael's, carried skyward the effect of some faith persisting, of a somehow good, in the struggle for gain which had thrust up the tall chimneys beside them.

As if the city corresponded to something inside himself, Wedmore could not help feeling that the somehow good was not to be fulfilled by retiring to Cleeve and leaving Barstow to stew in its own smoke, or even by showering down intellectual benefits, art galleries, libraries, museums and institutes upon

it; that one must live close and mould the present by the moral of the past. It might not be possible for the Barstow merchant or manufacturer to live over the shop as his fathers had done, but since he still lived over the shop—in the sense that Cleeve was above Barstow—he lost something, for both Barstow and himself, by disowning the connection.

There were sermons in stone in that slow spiral ascent from the harbour, through changing styles, to the heights of Cleeve, where a purely residential quarter opened out in terrace and crescent to the breezy Down. Thinking of it, architecturally, Wedmore admitted that it would be a tough problem to pick out the bones of the spiral, clear away the trash between, and restore the intervals to the body of grace; but the possibility was often in his mind as he looked down from the high-swung bridge on his way to Riverside.

For himself, the problem was architectural; but he had not been long in Barstow before he discovered that it presented itself to other minds in other terms. Not everybody in Barstow had made money by the war, and Wedmore soon began to make acquaintances outside the Pumphrey circle: small manufacturers, a parson or two, and some of the staff and supporters of the existing University. Their views, commercial, political, social or educational, complicated by local politics, were not always very clear to him; nor was he greatly interested in such questions; but he got the impression of what might be called an anti-Pumphrey party: people who distrusted short cuts to the millennium and believed in moral methods oddly akin to the patient architectural

exercises he imagined from the bridge. In so far as they were out to benefit Barstow, they would do it from within.

Except here and there one who had actually quarrelled with Sir John, or municipal rivals of his, like Stuckey, the contractor, they were anti-Pumphrey in ideals rather than in fact ; and, even allowing for the general knowledge of his connection with the family, Wedmore did not get the impression of any strong personal feeling against the Pumphreys. It was rather, as Sir John had said of Woodruff's reply to his letter, ironical.

Not all of these acquaintances were technically the "new poor," since many of them had been, and contentedly, poor all along ; any more than the Pumphreys were technically the "new rich" ; nor was the distinction that between "town" and "gown," since the commercial element was represented on both sides ; but the respective points of view were not unlike those associated with such conditions.

Wedmore found little difficulty in keeping in with both sides ; Sir John Pumphrey was the last man in the world to discourage what might be professional opportunities for social reasons, and the general attitude of the Pumphreys to Wedmore's Barstow friends was humorously indulgent, as to "back-numbers" ; but there were times when Wedmore felt that if he had not come in under the Pumphrey wing he might have enjoyed more congenial society.

## CHAPTER X

SIR JOHN PUMPHREY'S gift of a Technical Institute to his native city had not been without criticism. On the one hand, the University crowd, as it was customary to call them, complained that a truer friend of education would have remembered the crying need of that institution for enlargement; and, on the other, Sir John's colleagues on the City Council and in the Chamber of Commerce, who had mostly got on very well without education, literary or technical, asserted that the Memorial would have taken better form in new municipal buildings.

Then, of course, there were the merely envious, who said that Pumphrey, as a ship-owner, had no need to advertise his gains from the war; and the Cathedral authorities, who said that, if he had, there was an opportunity, sanctified by precedent in the history of Barstow, in the restoration of that venerable pile.

Sir John, however, had definite and at least respectable reasons for the form of his gift. He was one of the people to whom the lesson of the war was above all the need for efficiency; though his belief in technical education as the cure for all ills, domestic and international, was quite compatible with a benevolent regard for other forms of culture. Indeed

he would have said, and did say to Wedmore, that the value of Universities depended upon their being not too much distracted by the modern spirit. It was not for such as he to meddle with the humanities. His modesty in this was all the more striking in that, at a mature age, in order, as he said, to know what he was talking about, he had matriculated at London University.

“What we want,” he said, “and what we can do, is to make sure that our young men are properly prepared to take their part in those activities which, as business men, it is our privilege to direct and control.”

The flattering implication of this, and several other remarks of the same sort during their first acquaintance, was that Wedmore shared his enlightened view of the educational needs of the times. The truth was that Wedmore had thought very little about the matter, contenting himself with a clear grasp of the function and purpose of the Institute, and a sympathetic appreciation of its need to harmonise with the architectural character of both Barstow and Cleeve, as it was to serve their common interests.

Though Wedmore did not see it at the time, it was the same success of his design in meeting these requirements, which had gained him the premium, which had misled Sir John Pumphrey into supposing him an enthusiast for the cause—a common enough mistake in those who employ specialists of any kind.

Until now, however, Wedmore had not been aware of disapproving the purpose of the Institute.

He had simply not thought about it except architecturally. There were times when, repelled without fully understanding some observation of Sir John upon progress as he conceived it, Wedmore wondered if he had not gained Hilda a little on false pretences; but some deception was fair in love. As compensation, he was cheerfully prepared to submit to certain minor inconveniences of his engagement, such as learning golf and bridge, joining the Cleeve Conservative Club, and even allowing Sir John to suggest his name in a proper quarter for election as an Associate of the Royal Academy.

The Pumphrey ideals, as Wedmore gradually became familiar with them, were not his own; but there was nothing that could not be reconciled with a little tact, and he was not called upon to part with any of his convictions. It did not strike him as significant that he so little exposed his convictions to the Pumphreys that they frequently chaffed him on the wrong grounds—as when Hilda called him a ruthless modernist.

At least, it had not struck him as significant until now. How far Miss Woodruff's innocent remark that Dr. Shipton didn't believe in Technical Institutes had affected him, he did not know; but, when he came to think of it, nor did he. His deepest prejudices, indeed, were against technical education away from the workaday conditions of the job, partly from his own professional experiences and partly instinctive. He always got on best, as he said, "by feel," or, as other people said, by muddling through.

His visit to Moorend seemed to have undermined

his belief in the Institute—or, rather, in what the Institute stood for. The Institute itself was nothing; it had more than served its purpose both professionally and in love; and, in any case, he had got beyond the professional convictions expressed in a design now three years old; but there was the future to be considered. “Influence,” he perceived, had its penalties among its possibilities, and he saw himself committed to all sorts of uncongenial though profitable tasks at the expense of what he felt to be his real powers.

Point was given to this misgiving by the fact that, though he had plenty of work in the way of luxury building, owing to the slump the public schemes upon which he had relied for justification were hanging fire.

Fully aware that Miss Woodruff’s effect upon him was due to something more than the chance remark of a chit of a girl, Wedmore wished that his sexual and his vocational instincts were not so confoundedly mixed up. As the result of his visit to Moorend, he was back again in his old uncertainty between the top storey and the basement. All the Pumphrey associations, both professional and domestic, were eminently top storey. Until now he had accepted them cheerfully, with the private understanding that he could work in the basement as opportunity occurred—pretty much as he looked for the release of passion in his love for Hilda when they were married; but the Woodruffs—for he now broadened the disturbing factor—had put the two things in opposition. They linked on to all sorts of misgivings in his intercourse with the Pumphreys,



even with Hilda ; the solidarity was not only between them and Moorend and their father's reputation, but between them and what, deprecated by the Pumphreys, had pleased him in Barstow ; even what he had heard casually at Sir John's expense.

There was no evidence—indeed, the presumption was against it—that the Woodruffs were in with the University crowd, but he felt that they were with them temperamentally. They stood, in fact, for the anti-Pumphrey ideals ; and the quarters of Saint Michael's, which floated in through the window of his office as he bent over his drawing, came to him with " Trust your Angels " as the precept he had neglected in what now appeared to him as a short cut to success.

His one consolation in this mood was that the Pumphreys themselves felt the attraction of Moorend—the attraction of failure as it might be called in opposition ; and he envied them their power of responding to it sentimentally without swerving in their success. Dwelling upon this, he was inclined to make more and more of Woodruff, as distinct from his sister.

He was very glad indeed that Hilda was interested in Woodruff's Symphony ; that, in itself, might well afford some clue to the complacency between conflicting ideals which he envied in the Pumphreys. There were, he gathered, solutions in music which could not be expressed in words ; which were, indeed, beyond reason. Perhaps, through Hilda's interest in Woodruff, he might even come to regard Miss Woodruff with equanimity—as the baser instincts were said to be redeemed by love. The Symphony

itself, as Miss Woodruff had described it, meant something of the sort.

Yes, "Trust your Angels." There was room in life—and love—for the sort of appeal which might be described as dangerous, if you experienced it in the right spirit; and, certainly, Hilda was the last person in the world to want one to be "all very correct and priggish" in love. It was all this confounded business of sex. If he had met Woodruff instead of his sister on his first visit to Moorend, he could have lent himself to the attraction of the place—just as Hilda did—without the feeling of infidelity. It was her sex which gave Miss Woodruff a false advantage in his imagination, enabling her to stand for vocational ideals which she would be quite incapable of understanding.

Woodruff was, so to speak, his sister sterilised; he had all that really counted in the meaning of Moorend without the confusing appeal of sex.

The more Wedmore thought about Woodruff the more he hoped that the Pumphreys would take him up. Hilda did not understand the first word in building, though she could talk intelligently in the top storey region, but she understood music; and Woodruff, with his more fluid art, might easily prove to be not only a clue to the discrepancy in his own powers but an interpreter between him and Hilda. Translating it into professional terms, he thought of the acquaintance as the resolution of conflicting strains into mutual support.

## CHAPTER XI

A FEW days after the descent in force upon Moorend, Wedmore had occasion to meet Stuckey, the contractor, on the site of the Institute. He went to the meeting all the more gladly because he needed the reassurance of the building in actual progress, now, indeed, nearing completion, to counteract the misgivings about its purpose which had begun to reflect upon the design itself. He had, indeed, been turning over early drawings for the Institute at his office with the same sort of feelings as he supposed a barrister would have in reviewing his successful pleading in what he had come to suspect was a bad cause; and the thing might look better in reality than it did on paper.

The Institute fronted a continuation of the street which passed below Wedmore's lodging, at a point where the street widened to include the steeper ascent from Barstow into the commercial outskirts of Cleeve. From its position it might be said to symbolise the mingling of Barstow's higher aspirations with Cleeve's more practical condescensions; and, as better adapted to the educational needs of a time of expedience, to take the stage of the University—which retired into a park behind.

A somewhat florid Art Gallery, gift of a less enlightened citizen than Sir John Pumphrey, which flanked the Institute on the Cleeve side, had considerably increased the difficulties of Wedmore's design, the frankly commercial buildings on the Barstow side being much more easily reconciled—a fact which now struck him as dismally significant. English Renaissance with an Italian flavour had, however, solved the problem with a felicity which, together with severe adaptation to practical need, had left no doubt in the minds of the assessors, appointed by Sir John Pumphrey, to whom the competing designs had been submitted; and, quite apart from the local success, and the private advantage which had proceeded from it, the Institute had been the turning-point in Wedmore's professional career.

When Wedmore reached Stuckey, in the chip-strewn, plaster-smelling entrance hall of the Institute, he was a little disconcerted to find him in conversation with the stranger whom he had met on his first visit to Moorend, identified by Miss Woodruff as Dr. Shipton. The combination struck him as inconvenient. Miss Woodruff had said that Dr. Shipton did not like Sir John Pumphrey; and, in the larger field of municipal affairs, Stuckey was Sir John's persistent opponent—as he was said to be his nearest rival in wealth.

Wedmore rather liked Stuckey, whose mild, asthmatical appearance, with pince-nez and a thin beard, gave no clue to his ferocious Radicalism and reputation as a bloated profiteer; and Stuckey returned the liking with, at first, the good-humoured contempt

which the practical builder often professes for the architect. In spite of Stuckey's notorious atrocities in bricks and mortar for domestic purposes, he had a conscience about steel girders; he would scamp nothing in the way of construction, and Wedmore was indebted to him for the ingenious solution of many little practical difficulties arising out of the design. The mere fact that Stuckey, who never gave a penny for public purposes, should put in for and obtain the fat contract afforded by his more generous rival indicated, if not consistency, at any rate a sardonic humour.

Dr. Shipton, who carried books in a strap, explained his presence to Wedmore by saying that he had stepped across from the bookshop, over the way, to see how the Institute was getting on.

"I'm afraid I must have struck you as uncivil the other day," he continued, in the tone, however, of one who did not regret his action, "and I daresay, if I had known who you were then, I should have been tempted to remain in your company; but I always believe in allowing people to form their first impressions without let or hindrance."

His look, amusedly inquiring, as he spoke, suggested that he would like to have Wedmore's impressions of the subject indicated—after a civil but unilluminating response from Wedmore—by his next remark.

"Miss Woodruff told me who you were, and then, of course, I knew all about you—at least, all that can be known from the way a man tackles his job. May I say, Mr. Wedmore," he went on, with his easy manner and estimating glance, which would have been offensive but for the suggestion of an

old man's hobby, "that you are pretty much what I should have expected from your work. I will undertake to say that most people would fail to deduce your brains from your brawn, and I'm quite sure that they wouldn't give you credit for nerves."

"Mr. Wedmore's got plenty of nerve," said Stuckey, misunderstanding what was meant by the last word; "I've seen him go where I shouldn't have cared to venture, even at his age—or even you wouldn't, doctor, with your seafaring experience."

The allusion to seafaring served to distract Wedmore, who was getting a little restive under this discussion of himself. It explained, he thought, the slight effect in Shipton of a retired buccancer; an effect which, except for the gay silk muffler, was contradicted by the clerical suggestion of his black wideawake, dark overcoat, and rather long grizzled hair. "Something between a pirate and a professor," was Wedmore's final amused summing-up of Shipton's appearance.

"My friend Stuckey is too literal," said Dr. Shipton to the contractor's last remarks, "though I should have guessed that you could keep your head—possibly to a fault. However . . ."

He went on to pay Wedmore rather elaborate compliments on his design for the Institute, framing his sentences with care, and using technical terms with evident enjoyment and one eye on Stuckey, who stood by chewing a chip. The point of his remarks seemed to be to claim a private understanding of what Wedmore was driving at—though Wedmore did not always understand what he was.

Dr. Shipton, however, seemed to have a good

general knowledge of architectural styles and history, and a turn for mechanics. He talked a lot about Vitruvius, and occasionally dropped into Greek. He did not, now, discuss the purpose of the Institute, and he said nothing about Sir John Pumphrey.

At a sign of restlessness from Stuckey, he wound up: "Well, I'm only in the way here, and, in any case, I must catch my train. I'm glad to have made your acquaintance, Mr. Wedmore. Stuckey will tell you I am a hard case; but, if you are not afraid of evil communications—and I shouldn't say you were—I should like to drop in for a crack some day. I know where you live, and I come in pretty often to Charlton's"—he swung his books in the direction of the bookshop across the road. "Or, when you are out Moored way, my shanty is on the main road, at the corner. *Adios!*"

"Dr. Shipton is a very learned man," said Stuckey, as if in comment on the last word, as Shipton moved away.

The link between the two, it appeared, was the innocent one of fossils; the contractor, under Dr. Shipton's guidance, having gained a rough-and-ready knowledge of the objects which his business and the neighbourhood gave him peculiar opportunities of finding in the course of excavation.

Stuckey went on to say that the doctor wrote philosophical and, in his opinion as a Wesleyan Methodist, infidel books and papers about the origin of man. The doctor and the dean were always at it in the correspondence columns of the Barstow paper. It was in his youth that the doctor had followed the sea, when he was understood to be a turbulent customer.

The impression which Wedmore received from these remarks, as from Dr. Shipton's own manner and conversation, was that of an amateur of all the sciences, probably a belated Darwinian, a serious Agnostic and flogger of dead donkeys belonging to the Huxley controversies. Certainly he seemed proud of being regarded as a hard case.

It struck Wedmore as rather odd that though Dr. Shipton had referred to his visit to Moorend, and assumed that he would go there again, he said nothing about the reason of his visits. His alleged dislike of Sir John Pumphrey might account for that, but Wedmore—not without curiosity—felt that Dr. Shipton still had something to say to him about Miss Woodruff.

Though relieved as to the reason of it, Wedmore still felt a little uncomfortable about the fact of the association between Shipton and Stuckey; particularly when Stuckey went on to ask if Wedmore had heard if Miss Polly Pumphrey had recovered from her black eye, sustained, it appeared, in a mixed hockey match, the first of the season, in which young Gilbert Stuckey had also taken part.

Wedmore had assumed that Sir John Pumphrey would prefer that his interest in Moorend should not be discussed with the Stuckeys, and he wondered if Polly had been discreet. Stuckey who, to do him justice, never abused or even criticised Sir John to Wedmore, made no reference to Moorend; though he went on talking with reflective and affectionate amusement about Polly, calling her a "lively piece."

The business, which concerned such matters as the run of pipes in a laboratory, and the panelling



of a class-room, was soon settled ; and, at parting, Wedmore asked Stuckey if he thought everything would be ready for opening in April. It was then that Stuckey betrayed his habitual attitude to Sir John in the dry remark :

“ Oh yes, Mr. Wedmore ; Sir John can order luncheon for His Royal Highness any time after All Fools’ Day.”

The possibility of a Royal opening had not yet been more than breathed in the very bosom of the Pumphrey family ; but Wedmore, concealing his amusement, was compelled to admit to himself that it was not unlikely.

## CHAPTER XII

It was with mingled feelings that Wedmore heard from Hilda that Sir John Pumphrey had asked the Woodruffs to dinner at Riverside.

“Your father?” was his involuntary comment.

“Yes, I know,” said Hilda, with a pretty contraction of her brows; “he wrote to Mr. Woodruff himself.” After allowing a slight pause to mark the humorous intention of the last word, which she slightly emphasised, Hilda went on, “We told him that mother ought to write to Miss Woodruff, but you know what father is when he takes anything or anybody up; and, after all, we *do* want him to take Mr. Woodruff up, don’t we?”

Wedmore hastily agreed. The idea of taking Woodruff up gave him nothing but pleasure; not only as lending prestige to Hilda as a discoverer of talent—possibly genius—but also because he liked the young man and wanted to talk to him for his own advantage and, he hoped, to the advantage of his understanding with Hilda.

It was the idea of meeting Miss Woodruff as a fellow-guest, unprotected by the forms and circumstances of their previous acquaintance, which disconcerted him. The probability was that they two would be thrown together; and he mentally pictured

the arrangement of the Pumphreys' table. Incidentally, he wondered how Sir John had worded his invitation. As likely as not, he had said, "and bring your sister with you."

Aware of some reserve in his expression, Hilda said, "You don't mind, do you?"

"Lord, no!" he said, coming to himself. "I want very much to meet Woodruff again, and I believe he will turn out to be worth all the interest your father can give him."

He spoke from conviction. Since their visit to Moorend he had obeyed an inclination, which had often moved him before, to slip into Saint Michael's when the organ was going. Wedmore knew so little about music, technically, that he had always been shy of telling Hilda, or anyone else, that Bach appealed to him strangely; and Woodruff happened to be practising a fugue by that master.

Sitting in an obscure corner of the church, which already moved him strongly by its architecture, Wedmore enjoyed half an hour of not only delight to his ear but professional profit as well; since the working out of the subject stirred his plastic imagination into almost painful activity. He really could hear, or rather, feel, God laying the beams of His chambers in the waters—the occasional shudder of a roof timber in response to a pedal note completing the illusion.

How much of Wedmore's enjoyment was due to the character of the music, and how much to the merit of the playing, he was not able to judge; and, of course, Woodruff's ability as an organist was no proof of his genius as a composer; but there could

be no question that he was a serious musician.

Unwilling to risk spoiling the experience by letting Woodruff become aware of him as a listener, Wedmore repeated it, with the excited feeling of being on the edge of a secret which Woodruff might be able to interpret; but the experience was so far from what he supposed musical people to enjoy, and so close to the springs of his being, with their possibilities of danger, that he had said nothing about it to Hilda.

Wedmore was hardly surprised, and relieved rather than disappointed, when, on the evening of the dinner-party, Woodruff turned up alone. His sister, he explained to Lady Pumphrey, had become indisposed too late to make a telegram worth sending. He told his tale glibly enough, but Wedmore, who was listening with an amused appreciation of Woodruff's apparently unconscious correction of Sir John in addressing his explanation to Lady Pumphrey, observed that he did not add a personal message from his sister.

Lady Pumphrey was too much concerned at the news of Miss Woodruff's indisposition, though Woodruff assured her that it was not more than a threatened influenza, to show any doubt of its reality; but Hilda, as Wedmore saw from the sudden drop in her expression, guessed the truth, and put it down, as he did, to her father's want of tact.

As for Sir John, he seemed hardly aware that Miss Woodruff had not come; though, as he shook hands with Woodruff, he murmured with absent-minded affability, "Some other time, some other time."

It would have been more becoming, thought Wedmore, if Miss Woodruff had invented her excuse when her brother answered the invitation.

Wedmore was relieved that she had not come, but he could have wished that she had not given Hilda a grievance against her. It was a pity, he asserted, that Woodruff had a sister. Woodruff, and not she, was the "swarry" on this occasion.

The defection of Miss Woodruff caused some re-arrangement of the party, and Wedmore fell to a Miss Archdale, who was Hilda's bosom friend, and, according to Hilda, a blighted victim of himself. Miss Archdale, who was assistant mistress at the High School, and the acknowledged Minerva of Cleve, affected Wedmore with what he described as holy terror, though she was undeniably good to look at in a white, hollow-cheeked way. Her manner with Wedmore was that of an intellectual understanding in which she indulgently relinquished him to the more obvious bodily charms of her dearest friend. His male weakness blinked at—she performed the act more than once to Hilda across the table—Miss Archdale would always be there. Woodruff, as by right, was given to Hilda.

The only other guest was a Mr. Folkestone, a municipal colleague of Sir John's with a pull in the affairs of the Barstow Philharmonic Society.

From the presence of Mr. Folkestone, and from certain remarks let fall by Sir John during the earlier part of the meal, Wedmore gathered that Sir John had taken canny precautions lest the swan should turn out to be a goose. As Wedmore had predicted to Hilda, the Pumphreys had attended a Sunday

morning service at Saint Michael's in force ; but, in addition to that, there were references to this person and that in the musical world of Barstow. There could be no doubt that Sir John's investigations had given him a very respectful idea of Woodruff's abilities.

The occasion was so ostensibly for Woodruff's benefit—he had brought the score of the Symphony with him—that there could be nothing to slight him in Sir John's pointed account of his credentials and qualifications to Mr. Folkestone, who was a solemn, bald person with a Kitchener moustache and a manner of great responsibility.

Under this rather trying exhibition, Woodruff bore himself admirably ; he was shy, but not in the least awkward, and, without putting himself forward as a nervous man is apt to do when compelled to speak of his own performances, he gave explicit answers to such direct questions as were addressed to him ; admitting himself to be a medallist in composition at the Royal Academy of Music and a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists.

But what pleased Wedmore most of all was that, though he had felt from the first a freemasonry between himself and Woodruff, and though he was quite sure that Woodruff had a humorous appreciation of the Pumphrey atmosphere—he fenced, good-humouredly, for example, with Harry, who, misled by his frayed collar and shabby coat, was at first inclined to be patronising—he avoided anything like a private understanding with Wedmore at the expense of his hosts. A private, and even grateful understanding was in his friendly eyes, but it was purely

professional and, on this occasion, at any rate, it emphatically included Hilda.

The only person who seemed to have mental reserves about Woodruff was Polly. She gloomed upon him speculatively out of her discoloured eye, and Wedmore believed that she was suffering the pangs of baffled curiosity about Miss Woodruff.

It was quite clear that Woodruff had the good sense to appreciate his opportunity, and that he was grateful for it; most of all grateful to Hilda. He, at any rate, did not make his sister's mistake of mixing up Hilda with her father. It was this as much as anything which answered the question which had been vaguely forming in Wedmore's mind: whether Woodruff ought to have come without his sister. Certainly he had been right to ignore some social irregularity in an invitation which had been intended chiefly for his professional advancement. Coupled with what she herself had admitted about her domestic shortcomings, her inability or disinclination to "hustle round," Wedmore was inclined to think that, not to speak of the snub to Hilda, as he felt it, Miss Woodruff's defection showed an imperfect regard for her brother's interests.

Woodruff, he said, watching him, was a sensible fellow—even to the extent of thoroughly enjoying his excellent dinner. He did not neglect Hilda, for whom his admiration was evident, nor Lady Pumphrey at her end of the table; and he was free enough from self-consciousness to give an amused attention to Polly beside her father; but he ate and drank with the discrimination of a man aware of his opportunity and determined to <sup>u</sup>make <sub>a</sub> the most

of it. Evidently the opportunity, though rare for him, was not the first of its kind; and, as a man but lately come to success, well knowing the shifts and deprivations of struggling talent, Wedmore watched him with sympathetic approval.

The only thing that spoilt a little Wedmore's enjoyment of the evening was Lady Pumphrey's continued concern about Miss Woodruff. Lady Pumphrey was more detached than the others from the real business of the evening, and Wedmore could see that she was thinking more about the absent sister than the present brother; and her occasional questions to Woodruff were about his domestic rather than his professional affairs.

Lady Pumphrey was a dear, but her range was limited; and Wedmore could not help feeling her persistent interest in the absent guest as, somehow, a criticism of himself—as if he ought to have been more disappointed than he allowed himself to feel that Miss Woodruff was not there. His mental comment, whenever her name came up, was, "Confound Miss Woodruff!"

After one of Lady Pumphrey's questions about where the Woodruffs intended to live when they left Moorend, Miss Archdale, who, as is common with self-conscious people, had the unfortunate knack of attracting excessive attention by trivial remarks, leant forward in a rather portentous way, and said to Woodruff,

"Wasn't your sister at Cleeve High School?"

It was then that, for the first time, Woodruff betrayed some embarrassment, though he looked amused.



“Only for one term,” he said, with something of the grim intonation which Miss Woodruff herself had used in speaking of the experience.

Hilda looked at Woodruff, and then at Miss Archdale, who said, “I thought I was not mistaken,” and sat back, with a faint smile.

Wedmore was left with the disagreeable impression that Miss Archdale’s presence, which, though she was a member of the Philharmonic Society, had been puzzling him a little, was explained by some intention not altogether kindly towards Miss Woodruff. A subdued, humorous yelp from Harry suggested that Polly, who openly hated Miss Archdale, had nudged or kicked him; and then Sir John made a diversion by saying,

“By the way, Folkestone, since my wife has mentioned the subject of Moorend, we are within walls. Moorend is for sale, and I intend to bid for it in the interests of these young people; but there is no reason why we should go out of our way to invite competition.”

“I take you,” said Mr. Folkestone, with infinite sagacity, and drank wine as the tribute of one business man to another.

“Has anybody else been out to look at Moorend?” said Sir John casually, to Woodruff on his right.

“Only some Americans, and a man from Birmingham,” said Woodruff; “but my sister said that neither of them seemed very keen.”

He spoke to Sir John, but his eyes wandered with a surprised expression to Polly, who sat opposite. Wedmore could not see Polly’s face at the moment, but as if in answer to Woodruff’s questioning look,

Harry said, "Pretty Polly Parker can't get over not having a finger in the pie"; and then there was a little scuffle.

Lady Pumphrey said absently, "Now, you two!" and Miss Archdale blinked at Hilda her view of Polly's educational disadvantages.

Wedmore was left with the suspicion that Polly was up to mischief of some sort, and he made a mental note that he would talk to her privately. Polly was a very good friend of his, but her notions of pleasing her friends were apt to be complicated by the hope of doing some irrelevant person in the eye, as she put it herself; and he had an idea that Miss Archdale's allusion to Miss Woodruff had made Polly a champion of that inconvenient young woman.

The conversation having turned that way, Woodruff, without obtruding a lack of means which was evident enough to Wedmore, gave a reasonable explanation of his comparative indifference to leaving Moorend. Lady Kelmscot, he said, had been most considerate; had given him early opportunity to buy the place, and would willingly have kept the Woodruffs as unprofitable tenants if the terms of her husband's will had not compelled her to sell that part of the estate whenever money was needed.

Hilda, as Wedmore observed, was particularly interested in this explanation; and he judged from her sympathetic expression that she was thinking Miss Woodruff a poor sort of creature not to have made some effort to enable her brother to keep up their home. As Wedmore said to himself complacently, Hilda, though accustomed to every luxury,

would have worked her fingers to the bone, indoors and out, if he had been in similar case.

Sir John's comment was that Woodruff would be well-advised to think twice about going to London; and Mr. Folkestone said darkly that you never knew what might happen.

The only time that Woodruff took Wedmore into the confidence that was latent between them was when, after the ladies had left the table, the and conversation turned upon the burden of taxation, Mr. Folkestone referred, in a voice of trembling awe, to a business friend of his who had had to pay income tax "out of capital." Woodruff looked across the table at Wedmore with such a simmer of amusement in his dark grey eyes, that Wedmore had to smile in return. It was as if Woodruff had claimed him for Moorend, and for all that Moorend stood for in the recesses of his mind.

## CHAPTER XIII

ONE of the features of Riverside—it had, indeed, been the chief object of Wedmore's enlargement of the house—was a music-room overlooking the river and communicating with the loggia which he had also designed. Coffee was brought there, and then Woodruff proceeded to the real business of the evening: to give such an impression of "Saint Michael and All Angels" as could be conveyed with the piano.

Though a fragrant wood fire was burning in the room, the evening was fine and warm; and, with adorable tact, Hilda cloaked herself and drew Wedmore into the loggia so that they might listen to the music without any distraction but their love—with, rather, its enhancement—in the purple dusk which rose from the river below. Her slow, quiet kiss, as they joined both hands for a moment, might have been the return of herself from his generous loan of her at the table to the author of their pleasure to come. Her sudden gravity, after their light words over coffee, showed that, though justified in feeling confident, she hoped that her confidence was not misplaced. She trembled as she said,

"I hope he will do justice to your beautiful room."

Before he began to play, Woodruff gave a short

description of the subject of the Symphony, and Wedmore was struck by the quiet authority of his voice as it came through the wide, open doorway. It was as if he spoke of something for which he was not responsible; and Wedmore noticed in passing that the slightly effeminate character of his appearance was entirely absent from his voice. The effect of both the Woodruffs—though in contrary directions—was intensified when they were heard and not seen.

When Woodruff had finished speaking, Sir John said, "Precisely," and Mr. Folkestone murmured, "Hear, hear"; and Hilda moved a little away from Wedmore and leaned on the parapet with her face to the river, as if to avoid anything which might obscure critical attention.

The Symphony opened with the familiar "quarters" of Saint Michael's, followed by an effect of change-ringing on bells; which, however, though remaining strongly diatonic, soon broadened in character until it seemed to embrace by suggestion all the noises of the city—street cries, the rumbling of wheels, the clang of cars, the "trip, trip" of passing feet, and even scraps of shanties from the harbour. There was colour in it, as of rich cargoes on the quays; though there still persisted an aerial melody as of bright beings who circled the tower in the eddying harmonics of the bells.

Wedmore could at least feel himself in Barstow; and, though not a critic of means, he was struck by the directness and simplicity with which he was placed there. Simplicity, indeed, was the prevailing character—as compared with that of most modern

music he had heard. There were no "thick chords," as he phrased it to himself; but there was, instead, a close interplay of outlines, so that the image which came into his mind was that of a silvery pencil-drawing. No doubt he was influenced by knowing that Saint Michael's tower was intended; but there were passages in which the traceried parapet and crocketed pinnacles, its chief beauties, were clearly before him.

After passing through the full pageant of the city, without losing touch with the skies, the movement ended, as it had begun, with the quarters, followed by the twelve strokes of midnight.

The delighted exclamations from the women inside the room might, of course, be accounted for by the familiarity of the sounds they had heard; and, except for a measured "Good, good!" from Sir John, he and Mr. Folkestone properly reserved their opinions; but Hilda came swiftly to Wedmore, and said, "Have no fear; it's the real, right thing!" There was no mistaking the quiet and, as he believed, informed conviction under her trembling eagerness; and, as if a word or a kiss would profane her exalted mood, he answered only with a pressure of the hand.

If the first movement had given Wedmore a picture of Barstow, that which followed, in slower time, seemed to let him into the hearts of its inhabitants. Love and hate, happiness and grief, help and conspiracy, were here suggested by melodies which were subtle by their interwoven texture rather than by chromatic intervals of progression.

The music was reflective rather than dramatic,

like a mirror of sound upon which passed and faded the varying moods of humanity ; and the confusion in which they presently mingled seemed to be deliberate. There was warring under the surface, while above, though fainter and in broken phrases, the bells or angels, or both, reiterated their warning. In this medley of sound, a more regular rhythm in the bass, tentative at first, gained and held by sheer persistence ; the angelic overtones quivered away, and the movement ended in a somewhat barren formality.

This time there were no exclamations from within the room, whether from perplexity or by the example of Sir John and Mr. Folkestone ; but Wedmore, looking at Hilda in the deepened dusk, saw that, though evidently uncertain of the composer's intention, she smiled reassuringly.

When the music began again, Hilda murmured, "Ah, the *Scherzo* " ; and Wedmore recognised what Miss Woodruff had described as " all very correct and priggish," when the angels had been improved away. So far as he was able to judge, it was a good musical joke ; with, he guessed, some caricature of other composers. He fancied, for example, allusions to anthems and Anglican chants, and some hints of a pompous patriotism. But when the joke had been carried to the edge of banality the music broke down without a pause into what he supposed to be "Hell and Tommy," with fashionable discords, erratic syncopation, and pointless changes of time.

Now the people in the room laughed, uncertainly, and Polly was heard to claim excitedly the recognition of a favourite fox-trot.

The last movement opened with a similar jangle of sound, as if the city, harmonised into "somehow good" in the first movement, had been resolved into its conflicting elements. Everything was, as Wedmore described it to himself, all at sixes and sevens.

But, presently, filling up the intervals between one broken melody and another, Wedmore became aware of a faint though persistent—"humming," he was compelled to call it; and his mind went back to France, and the distant drone of aircraft. The drone increased and came nearer, overcoming the jangle and resolving it, until there was a full body of sound which broke, finally, into almost articulate cries of victory, mingled with the clashing of bells.

Without waiting a moment, Hilda darted into the room; and Wedmore, following, more than forgave her desertion of himself. She wanted Woodruff to see her in that perilous moment of reaction, when an "if" or a "but" may set the key of judgment. Her shining face resolved the uncertainty of the room, and they all began clapping and talking excitedly.

Sir John crowed, "Magnificent! But, my dear fellow——!" Mr. Folkestone boomed, "Very good. Oh, very good indeed." Lady Pumphrey, with her head on one side, and tears trickling down her nose, clapped softly; and Polly, white and gaping, clung to her mother and stared at Woodruff with frightened eyes. When the first round was over, Harry said, "I congratulate you, Woodruff," as if he had formally accepted him; and Miss Archdale said, "You have given us a *wonderful* experience."



For a moment or two Woodruff was overcome. He looked at Hilda, as she approached, with a curious timidity. What reassurance she gave him was only in her glance, for all that she said was, "It must have been a fearful ordeal"; but, as Wedmore agreed, her glance ought to be enough for any man. Woodruff, near to tears, turned away with a choking sound of gratitude. Wedmore, feeling like an elder brother, contented himself with a friendly grasp of Woodruff's arm.

Hilda, with her usual tact, eased the emotional situation. "You see, Mr. Folkestone," she said in a matter-of-fact tone, "we did not get you here on false pretences."

"It will have to be done, it will have to be done," he murmured, with one eye on Sir John.

"Now," said Sir John in his briskest manner, clapping his hands for attention. "Procedure! How can we get hold of Ingram and make him listen to it?"

He looked at Hilda speculatively, so that Polly's tension broke in a cackle.

"First thing is to find backers, I should say," said Harry sagely, as he offered Woodruff a cigarette.

"Of course I shall guarantee the cost of publication myself," said Sir John airily; and Hilda shot him a startled glance. Evidently even she had not expected so much as that.

"But," she said eagerly, "Barstow must have the honour of the first performance."

"If I may make a suggestion," said Woodruff modestly, "the best way would be to let Dr. Ingram have the score, with a word from you and Sir John,

so that he may judge for himself. Then, if he feels inclined to go any further with it, I shall be only too happy to play it through to him and discuss any criticisms he may make."

The wisdom of this was evident, and so it was agreed, Mr. Folkestone undertaking to lend his weight with the Committee of the Philharmonic Society, and to make it clear to them that any incidental expenses involved in the production of a new work would be met by Sir John Pumphrey.

While the others refreshed themselves, Woodruff and Hilda, at the piano, discussed details of orchestration, he playing a few bars here and there, and she humming a voice part. The words, it appeared, were taken from a canticle in monkish Latin, which Woodruff had discovered in the Cathedral library, and were given to choruses of bells and angels. Except for an occasional recitative, there were no solo parts, and the suggestion of the city, even to the street cries, was purely instrumental.

Hilda's excited preoccupation with the music was only natural, but presently, as if conscious of what might seem neglect, she came to Wedmore and said,

"It was you, *you* who told us about it. But for you we should never have known. And it *is* your Saint Michael's! . . . Oh, I *wish*," she added fretfully, with a glance at her father which betrayed her opinion of the reason for the girl's absence, "that Miss Woodruff had come. She seems so out of it!"

Though appreciating her thoughtfulness, Wedmore did not thank her for reminding him of what, until

now, he did not know that he had been trying to forget.

“Miss Woodruff,” he said drily, “will get all the practical benefit when it comes off.”

“Yes, I suppose she will,” said Hilda, though in a dissatisfied tone, “but not all this !”

She made a little gesture, indicating the circumstances and surroundings of a red-letter evening.

Wedmore could see her point, that this was the real discovery of Woodruff, though, since Hilda herself, a true daughter of the sun in white and gold tissue, was the goddess of the discovery, he rather doubted if Miss Woodruff would regret her deprivation ; and then said to himself that the doubt was unjustified. Miss Woodruff seemed to have the unfortunate property of making him think unworthily.

There could be no doubt that, though he made every allowance for the fallibility of Hilda’s judgment, Sir John Pumphrey was deeply impressed. He and Mr. Folkestone talked apart, with wagging heads, and it was evident to Wedmore that Woodruff himself had already become a minor consideration in the promised opportunity for a sensational success in a new field of patronage. So far, and including even the Institute, Sir John’s efforts had been hardly more than local ; but this would mean the larger world—would mean, too, cutting the ground from under the feet of those who professed to regard his benefactions to Barstow as utilitarian and, in the long run, interested. There could be no profit in running a composer.

If Wedmore were not mistaken, Sir John was already reading the press notices, and Mr. Folkestone

was dully insisting upon the need for caution. He kept repeating the name of Dr. Ingram.

Sir John's intentions were interpreted by Harry in a sedulous attention to Woodruff. Polly hovered about, as she would have said, "parkering," and biting her cheek thoughtfully; though her only comment, when Wedmore offered her twopence for her thoughts, was, "Pa's gone in off the deep end."

When, with a flush of confusion as he saw the lateness of the hour, Woodruff said that he must be going, Lady Pumphrey betrayed her reflections of the evening by saying regretfully,

"We ought to have sent the car for you."

If any opportunity to excuse his sister was intended, Woodruff was too honest to take it. "No, indeed," he said hastily; "we have an arrangement with Maggs, the farmer, for a man and trap whenever we are late in town. This evening, as I was coming alone, I bicycled in, and left my machine at the pub across the bridge. I shall be home in less than an hour."

Hilda accompanied the two young men up the drive to the level of the road, the house being below it, sliding her left hand into Wedmore's as she gave her right to Woodruff at the gate. The action seemed to Wedmore a pretty, though, for his part, an unnecessary appeal for their friendship under her benediction.

Woodruff, quivering with excitement, walked with quick steps which occasionally broke into a run to keep up with the longer strides of his companion as they crossed the bridge.

As was natural, he talked incessantly of the Symphony, expressing his doubts and fears, asking Wedmore's opinion of this passage and that, and returning again and again to his gratitude to the Pumphreys. He said that he had never met anybody so quick as Hilda in seeing one's intentions. It was a great pity she had given up the Philharmonic Society. If she could only be with him when he ran over the thing to Dr. Ingram, he felt sure that what seemed like difficulties would disappear. The instrumental work was all plain sailing, but there were some awkward intervals for the voices, and what was wanted was a good lead.

Less welcome to Wedmore, though he approved it on principle, was Woodruff's gratitude to his sister. She was not a musician, he said, but she had an extraordinary instinct for the right shade of feeling, and he had discussed every detail with her; and, indeed, Wedmore was compelled to admit to himself that Miss Woodruff's description of "Saint Michael and All Angels" had shown a complete grasp of its meaning. He could not have followed it so intelligently without her description. He had followed it so closely from that point of view that he could not speak of its merits as music, but he had every faith in Hilda's judgment.

So, with the good-natured feeling that this was Woodruff's night out, he let him run on, contenting himself with encouraging noises. This was not the opportunity for what he really wanted of Woodruff; its nature being indicated when, in response to his question, Woodruff eagerly admitted that the return of the angels, in the *bouche fermée*

chorus, really had been suggested to him by the approach of aircraft in France.

“You wait and wait for them to become articulate,” he said. “I don’t know how it was with you,” he added in a lower tone, as one referring to a disgraceful episode, “but the whole thing, though I hated and funked it all the time, was a wonderful inspiration.”

“Yes,” said Wedmore with a laugh, “I built many a mansion out of barrages.”

He parted from the young man at his pub with cordial promises of improved acquaintance. On the whole, he thought, it simplified matters that Miss Woodruff should hold aloof from the Pumphreys. By putting her in the wrong it, so to speak, legitimised her as a subject for speculation.

## CHAPTER XIV

WEDMORE did not know whether to be glad or sorry when Hilda said to him, the next Sunday afternoon, as they walked on Cleeve Down,

“By the way, your Miss Woodruff seems to be a bit of a Cleopatra. Carrie says that her term at the High School is historical.”

He was glad to have Miss Woodruff brought to the surface in a character which seemed, somehow, to excuse his absurd weakness for her, but he was sorry that Hilda, who was generally above gossip, should be the person to do it. “Carrie” was Miss Archdale.

“My Miss Woodruff, as you call her,” he said, affecting a slight jocularly to avoid reproving stiffness, “is evidently a young woman of unconventional manners, but she must have been a mere infant when she was at Cleeve High School.”

“That’s just it,” said Hilda amusedly, and with no sign of malice, “but I can assure you that she made an impression upon the authorities. Fortunately, Mr. Woodruff took her away; but there were mutterings about bad influence on the other girls.”

“What did she do?” said Wedmore, feeling somehow as if the question, which was intended to

convey indifference, sounded like prurient curiosity.

"She didn't 'do' anything," said Hilda; "it was rather what she let be done to her—and, apparently, she couldn't help it. Surreptitious letters, and that sort of thing. I believe there was bloodshed on her account."

"'Boys will be boys,' " quoted Wedmore.

"But, my dear," said Hilda compassionately, "it was butcher-boys!"

"Oh, Miss Archdale was trying to make your flesh creep!" said Wedmore.

"Well, she didn't succeed," said Hilda composedly. "On the contrary, it only makes Miss Woodruff more interesting; don't you think so? That's what I meant by calling her a 'Cleopatra'; I meant it as a sort of compliment. There are women like that, you know. It isn't what they do, but what they *are*. A sort of fatality. Not 'the fatal gift of beauty'; that isn't quite it. Nobody knows what it is. You only know it when you feel it. . . .

"Miss Woodruff," she continued luxuriously, as Wedmore did not speak, "is all in the picture. I don't know if you know it, but her mother ran away with her father—which explains a great deal in his work. Read 'Next to Nothing,' and then you'll understand. I don't mean that it is autobiographical, but there is a something—and then you say, 'Ah, of course!' That's why I was so anxious to see Miss Woodruff—to see if it came out in her. I don't say I should have spotted it if I hadn't heard the story; but the moment we got to Moorend, there it was. Why, my dear man, it's all over the place;



an atmosphere, a *cachet*. Now you can understand why I am so keen about Moorend—apart from the attractions that even *you* can feel, utilitarian creature that you are. We inherit a background.”

Her expression, half playful, half shy, as she said the last sentence, in which “for our love” was implied, ought to have delighted a lover; but Wedmore was disturbed. The truth, as he felt it, of what Hilda said, did not make him any better pleased at her saying it; and that she should welcome what he feared gave him a curious effect of insensibility in her. Her detached, and by no means unkindly, view of Miss Woodruff repelled him—as when people find æsthetic pleasure in the misfortunes of others. It went, somehow, with what he felt to be the Pumphrey attitude, not only to Moorend, but many other things that he cared about; a sort of exploitation of the picturesque.

Worst of all was the horrid feeling that he had drawn Hilda on; that he had let her expose her insensibility in order to justify what he could not now deny to be an attraction in Miss Woodruff—though it was an attraction against his will. Unreasonably enough, he blamed Miss Woodruff for his not having saved Hilda from herself. She distorted his imagination, like the Snow Queen in Anderson’s fairy-tale.

Shrinking from a direct reproof, he said, “My dear girl, you let your imagination run away with you. Moorend is a beautiful place, and the Woodruffs are interesting people; but there is nothing”—he hesitated for the word—“uncanny about it or them.”

Hilda laughed out at that. "One says to him," she said, addressing a stooping hawthorn at the edge of the gorge, "'*Embarquons nous pour la Cythère,*' and he calls it 'uncanny'!"

They had come up to the railing which fenced a jutting cliff, almost opposite Riverside; and, in view of the gorge, with its rolling woods, which opened seawards, he could have wished that they were embarking for a world in which life was not complicated by conflicting appeals; but some perversity prompted him to say,

"Was that why you asked Miss Archdale to meet them?"

"We are not all so uncommunicative as you," said Hilda, with her hands on the railing. "I told her about our visit to Moorend, and then she remembered Miss Woodruff. I thought it would be pleasant to have a sort of link; and Carrie is always glad of an opportunity to talk to you. She says that you are so real, and that you don't know your own powers. She is always quoting you. Carrie was very disappointed that Miss Woodruff did not come; she was afraid that you found her a poor substitute."

"Carrie seems to have done her best to make up for Miss Woodruff's not appearing in person," said Wedmore grimly.

"You're not fair to Carrie, you know," said Hilda, studying him composedly as he leant on the railings. "Carrie is not malicious, but, like all high-brows, she's a bit of a prude. As a matter of fact I pulled her leg. I told her that that sort of thing couldn't have happened at Chelters, because we were too much occupied with games. You can

always get a rise out of old Carrie by comparing Chelters with Cleeve. It was Polly who upset the apple-cart. With the impetuosity of youth, she took what Carrie said the wrong way ; and then, of course, Carrie said an improving word about Miss Polly's own recreations."

With the rather scared reflection that a man never made sufficient allowance for feminine discussion, Wedmore said, as they walked on,

"Well, anyhow, it was a good evening ; and it served its purpose, didn't it ?"

"Rather !" said Hilda ; and then, after a pause, "You don't mind ?"

"Mind what ?"

"Well—Mr. Woodruff."

"I mind very much that he should be given a chance," said Wedmore heartily, "and I am confident that he is worth while."

"That's very generous of you," said Hilda, in a little rush, and quickening her pace. "I wasn't supposing that you would mind in any vulgar way ; what I meant was that you will probably have to put up with the devastating family joke. You know what Harry and Polly are."

Wedmore said that he could bear the family joke. If he had been a little more explicitly truthful he would have said that he welcomed it, as reducing to absurdity his own misgivings about himself. With Miss Archdale at the back of his mind, he could not deny that he was rather glad than otherwise that Hilda should give him this opportunity to say how silly and offensive he thought that sort of discussion ; and, in his eagerness to make the most

of the opportunity, he began to talk enthusiastically about Woodruff, repeating seraps of their conversation on the walk after dinner, particularly Woodruff's remarks about Hilda.

As if encouraged by his generosity, Hilda took up the tale, and spoke her heart about Woodruff; revealing a considerable acquaintance with his affairs. It was dreadful, she said, that a sensitive man like that, and a man of genius, should have to waste his time teaching little brats the piano. He ought to have things made easy for him; and it was more than a personal kindness to Mr. Woodruff to keep her father up to the mark. It was a public duty. The Woodruffs, she was afraid, were horribly poor. Mr. Woodruff had not complained, he was entirely unworldly; but she could read between the lines.

It was a pity Miss Woodruff was so difficult. Mr. Woodruff had spoken of her with grateful affection; but Hilda had an idea that, if she could only get Miss Woodruff alone, she could make her see that she could help her brother in social ways as well as by attending to his material wants. Girls did not always understand that.

"But *you* know," she exclaimed, pressing her lover's arm. "Though it isn't quite the same for you, you strong, self-reliant creature. Your genius is of a sterner sort. You are not subject to the same doubts and fears; and I believe that, in your heart of hearts, you prefer to be let alone, to carve out your own reputation in your own way. Anyhow, I can't imagine you as a 'leaner' on anybody!"

All this was very grateful to Wedmore; and, in his responses, protesting that even he was not above

sympathetic appreciation, he was conscious of a sneaking desire to make Woodruff the peg of his more confidential remarks to Miss Woodruff on his first visit to Moorend. Undoubtedly, Woodruff was the clue to the meaning of Moorend.

Wedmore seemed fated, however, to be reminded of Moorend through the wrong channel. The following afternoon, Hilda called at his office in the car and took him up to Charlton's, the bookseller's, to get "Next to Nothing," which, she had decided, would be his best introduction to Woodruff. Old Mr. Charlton, who was famous in that neighbourhood, was one of Woodruff's fervent admirers; and Hilda's request for the book delighted him. He was in the middle of personal reminiscences of the author, when, glancing past Wedmore, he broke off to say:

"Ah, here comes the gentleman who knows more about Woodruff than anybody else in the world."

Wedmore looked round to see Dr. Shipton, whose attention, he observed, was fixed on Hilda.

"We were speaking of Woodruff," said Mr. Charlton to the doctor, preparing for introductions.

"Oh, Mr. Wedmore and I are old friends," said Dr. Shipton easily, "but——"

The uncompleted sentence, together with the glance, made his introduction to Hilda imperative. In a younger man Dr. Shipton's estimating glance at Hilda under his brows, though perfectly respectful, even admiring, as he shook hands with her, would have seemed impertinent; but it was natural in him.

"Mr. Wedmore has never read Woodruff," said Hilda, with her easy friendliness, holding up the book,

“I guess Mr. Wedmore doesn't need to, Miss Pumphrey,” said Dr. Shipton. “If I have gauged him rightly, Woodruff will be his poison.”

“That's exactly what I told him!” said Hilda delightedly. “You are either immune, or else you are Woodruff's.”

Dr. Shipton's rather oracular manner made it difficult to tell whether or not the smile which greeted this remark was ironical. He made no comment, but went on to Wedmore,

“I've been thinking over what you said to Beatrice about building, and I believe there is more in it even than you think.”

Surprised both by the unexpected familiarity of the name, and by the information that Miss Woodruff had thought it worth while to repeat him, Wedmore felt himself colouring; but Hilda, with an eagerness which was in itself a reproach for his professional reticence with her, exclaimed,

“What was that—what was that?”

“I was only trying to explain to Miss Woodruff how building was done,” said Wedmore awkwardly.

“Other things besides building, I guess,” said Dr. Shipton, taking the parcel of books which a girl assistant had been getting for him.

With the digression from Woodruff, Mr. Charlton had drifted away to the back of the shop. Hilda looked mystified at Dr. Shipton's remark, and a little snubbed. She was not quick to feel slighted, but, as Wedmore saw, she evidently understood that Dr. Shipton, for all his admiration, regarded her as irrelevant. Too sure of herself to betray resent-

ment, however, she held out her hand to the doctor, with a bright smile, and said,

“ Well, you shall tell me about that another time.”

Dr. Shipton uncovered with exemplary politeness as he shook hands, and accompanied the pair to the door, where the car was waiting. Wedmore regretted that he had previously arranged with Hilda to part from her there ; and he would have disregarded the arrangement if her evident wish that he should talk to Dr. Shipton had not made it difficult to do so without discussion ; and the car went off with Hilda, leaving the two men together on the pavement.

## CHAPTER XV

DR. SHIPTON, taking his welcome for granted, said that he had an hour to spare ; and, in view of his previous request, Wedmore could hardly without rudeness avoid asking him to come in for a smoke and a talk.

Remembering Miss Woodruff's remark that Dr. Shipton didn't like Sir John Pumphrey, Wedmore half expected him to say something about Hilda ; but, to all appearances, the old man had forgotten all about her already. As they crossed the broad way where the steep and the gradual ascents from Barstow into Cleeve converged in front of the Institute, and followed the street which led to Wedmore's lodgings, Dr. Shipton proceeded to develop at length a theory of his own that all creative effort was guided if not inspired by muscular sympathy.

Dr. Shipton's indifference to Hilda would have piqued Wedmore if he had not soon perceived that it extended to everything and everybody after he had pigeon-holed them to his satisfaction, unless they lent themselves to the argument he happened to be pursuing. Talking all the time, he followed Wedmore up the green tunnel and into the house without making any comment on what he saw. It might have been his hundredth visit instead of



his first. When they were seated in Wedmore's panelled room on the first floor, with its three tall, deeply-recessed windows commanding a view of the city to the hills beyond, Dr. Shipton refused a cigarette, but filled a disreputable pipe with black tobacco which he cut from the cake and rubbed in his palms.

Observing the action, and as an opening, Wedmore made some allusion to the doctor's sea-going experience.

"Who told you that I had been to sea?" said Dr. Shipton, cocking an eye at him.

Wedmore reminded him of what Stuckey had said when they met at the Institute.

"Stuckey," said Dr. Shipton, as he lit and pulled at his pipe, "is an intellectual flat-foot. And, by the way, if I were you, I shouldn't boast of your acquaintance with me to Pumphrey."

He spoke good-humouredly, even amusedly, but Wedmore was left with the impression that, like many inquisitive people, Dr. Shipton didn't like being asked questions. Something, too, must be allowed for his evident pride in being regarded as a hard case.

The point of the visit seemed to come out when Dr. Shipton, settling himself as if for a long stay, remarked,

"You have never told me what you thought of Beatrice Woodruff."

Wedmore answered glibly enough that his acquaintance with Miss Woodruff had only allowed him to form the most general impressions, but that she struck him as an interesting girl; adding that he hoped Miss Woodruff had recovered from her cold.

“Oh, Beatrice is all right,” said Dr. Shipton carelessly; and went on, “As I said the other day, I thought it better to let you take her in without assistance. I am apt to show Beatrice off. . . .” After a pause, in which some amused reflection was indicated, he added, “But Beatrice gave me a very consistent account of you.”

He did not volunteer any information about its character, and Wedmore asked no questions; and it soon became evident that Dr. Shipton not only had no pressing need of Wedmore’s impressions of Miss Woodruff, but that the point of his visit and his life’s hobby were the same. He described Miss Woodruff as her father’s most characteristic work; explaining his garrulous exposition of her to his present hearer by saying that what Wedmore had said about building was all of a piece with Woodruff’s philosophy of life; so that Wedmore was compelled to feel almost implicated in Miss Woodruff.

If she had been any other woman he would have been merely amused at the old man’s dotting upon the daughter of his dead friend, and would have drawn him out; but he did not want to be implicated in Miss Woodruff; so, while keeping the conversation upon her father, he tried to turn it from her. He spoke of her brother’s having dined at the Pumphreys.

“Yes, I know,” said Dr. Shipton indifferently, “and I daresay he was well advised to take the chance. Beatrice decided not to go; and, on the whole, she was right, as she generally is, to obey her disinclination; though it was no great matter whether she went or not.”

Waiving the slight to the Pumphreys, so coolly acknowledged, as natural in the speaker, though he did not yet know upon what grounds, Wedmore asked Dr. Shipton his opinion of young Woodruff's talents as a composer.

"Oh, Martin's all right," said Dr. Shipton indulgently. "He hasn't the guts of his father, and I don't take much stock in these new tendencies in music myself. Handel is good enough for me."

To keep the conversation in this neutral region, Wedmore said that the last remark seemed to him inconsistent with Dr. Shipton's general ideas, as he understood them. He agreed as to Handel's masculine merits, but—catching at an illustration from his own profession—objected that what he had heard of Handel's music reminded him rather of the static architecture of the ancients as compared with the organisation of thrusts and strains to emotional ends, as in Bach, for example, which belonged to later styles in building, and, he supposed, to the elder Woodruff's philosophy of life.

"I daresay you're right," said Dr. Shipton, without much interest. "I don't pretend to have worked out the mechanics of music as I have those of poetry and painting. I must think it over, and you might find it an advantage to look up what Herbert Spencer has to say about dealing with style on physical principles, in his 'Autobiography.' Martin seems to know what he is doing, and I gather that Pumphrey is disposed to give him a chance. I'm sure I hope he will have the success he deserves. Martin is an amiable lad, and very devoted both to his sister and his profession. . . ."

“But, speaking of Woodruff’s philosophy,” he went on, returning to the hobby which Wedmore, in his last words, had incautiously recalled, “you must not think that Woodruff was a faddist in education—or anything else. He saw through the Rousseau fallacy of leaving things to Nature; and I have never known a greater stiekler for social forms when they make for real order and simplicity. No, his idea of education was the more difficult one of finding the right form for the individual nature, so that none of it should be wasted, distorted or suppressed. Though he grounded both Martin and Beatrice himself—taught them Greek, for example—he sent Martin to Malwen and even let Beatrice go to Cleeve. But they didn’t seem to understand her there. It was the same outside school subjects. Martin is a muff in practical affairs, but Beatrice can cook a dinner as well as anybody. As a matter of fact, she is a very good housekeeper—and I have what they call at sea a ‘mate’s eye’ for dust, I can tell you. The point is that, unlike most women, she knows by instinct what matters and what doesn’t.”

His practical concern for Miss Woodruff’s future, which, against his will, kept coming to the surface, made Wedmore say that it was a pity, in these uncertain days, for girls to be brought up without some definite occupation.

“Ah,” said Dr. Shipton, emphasising the point with his pipe, “now you’re getting down to brass tacks. That was Woodruff’s enormous courage. It was he, you know, who said—*à propos* preparing for war—‘You prepare for measles—and then it turns out to be scarlet fever.’ Woodruff knew that he

could not leave his children very well provided for, though they would not be destitute; but, rather than stunt their full possibilities as human beings by too early specialisation of a so-called useful kind, he took all the risks. Hence, by the way, Martin's music."

It was mainly to see how he would get out of it that Wedmore ventured to remark that, unlike her brother, Miss Woodruff had no special talent.

"She has the talent for being a woman," said Dr. Shipton complacently, as if he had angled for that very catch. "If Woodruff swore by anything," he went on impressively, "he swore by life, and by life's capacity to fulfil itself if you do not abuse it. He was the only man I ever knew—we differed about religion, by the way—who believed implicitly in 'Cast thy bread upon the waters,' and 'Consider the lilies.' In that respect, as you will find when you read 'Next to Nothing'—though I should have advised 'Also Ran,' to begin with—he was Russian rather than English; Dostoievsky with Turgenieff's mastery of form, you might say. But he was anything but a fatalist. His was a positive and not a negative belief—and supremely optimistic. About women, in particular, he had ideas that most people would call old-fashioned. On the whole, he was against their having professions. I have heard him say that the oldest profession in the world was only an abuse of womanhood like the others. It was that sort of thing, by the way, which made fools call him an immoral writer. He held that a woman can always make good by virtue of her qualities as a woman—not as a female. That is as may be; but

you can bet your life that Beatrice will make good. As Woodruff would have said, there is always domestic service—though I don't think it need come to that for Beatrice."

In this strain he went on talking for an hour, with fond anecdotes of Miss Woodruff's talent for being a woman from childhood to the present day; including, he allowed it to appear, her attitude to the Pumphreys' invitation—though nothing further was actually said about it. Nor was there any reference to the Pumphreys' interest in Moorend; though this did not seem to be due to caution, or dislike of them, but simply to the doctor's habit of regarding everything as irrelevant which did not concern his hobby.

Wedmore, listening, had to concede that, allowing for the fondness, what Dr. Shipton said was pretty much of a piece with his own impressions of Miss Woodruff at Moorend; and, moreover, sufficiently in accord with his own prejudices to make it seem natural that the garrulous old gentleman had seized upon him as a confidant. Unable to recall anything he had said to betray such prejudices, he felt that Dr. Shipton must be uncannily perceptive; and the touch of the saturnine about him created the illusion of horns and hoofs.

The net result of Wedmore's mingled feelings was a complaint that the devil should have all the good tunes; and he was more than ever hopeful that some of them would be found in young Woodruff—whose "Saint Michael and All Angels," by the way, though Wedmore did not point this out to Dr. Shipton, might be called a musical version of his father's philosophy.

## CHAPTER XVI

WHEN, in response to a general invitation on the night of the dinner-party, young Woodruff did finally call upon Wedmore, he was spoilt for use, so to speak, by being troubled about his sister. It came out as a sequel to Woodruff's rather awkward attempt to sound Wedmore as to his opinion of Sir John Pumphrey's chances of success with the Philharmonic Society. The score of the Symphony was already in Dr. Ingram's hands, but he had made no pronouncement upon it.

"Please don't think me impatient," said the young man, colouring deeply under his dark skin, "but it will make some practical difference to my future arrangements. We have to turn out of Moor-end by the middle of November, and then I must decide whether to take rooms in Cleeve or go to London. My post at Saint Michael's and my pupils have also to be considered." He waited for a moment, and then went on, with more embarrassment, "The complication is that my sister does not want to live in Cleeve, or anywhere else in this neighbourhood."

Pleased that the young man should confide in him, and also glad of an opportunity to emphasise the Pumphrey power and influence in a quarter

where it might not be sufficiently appreciated, Wedmore said judiciously,

“ Well, of course, I can’t speak officially ; but, from what I know of local politics, and from what Miss Pumphrey says, I should say that there is no doubt that Sir John will bring it off. . . . But,” he added, “ even in that case the difficulty about Miss Woodruff will still remain, won’t it ? ”

“ I know,” said Woodruff, looking less pleased at the assurance about the Symphony than he ought ; “ but one thing, at least, will be settled. I shall have to stop down here until after the performance, and then, I suppose, join my sister in London.”

The tone of the last words did not suggest eagerness ; and Wedmore, surprised at the apparent reversal of the Woodruffs’ views about finding a home, said that he hadn’t understood that Miss Woodruff really wanted to live in London.

“ Nor had I,” said Woodruff, with a grateful glance at him for broaching the question of Miss Woodruff’s desires ; “ nor, indeed, am I at all sure she *does* want to live there. It is, rather, that she won’t stop here.”

The touch of irritation in the last sentence did not escape Wedmore ; and he said, “ I’m afraid Miss Woodruff feels leaving Moorend very deeply.”

“ She does,” said Woodruff ; and then hastily, “ But please, please don’t think she bears any resentment against you or the Pumphreys. As I tell her, that would be most unreasonable, because we should have had to turn out in any case—except in the extremely unlikely event of anybody’s buying Moorend who didn’t want to live there themselves.



Even then the rent would certainly be beyond us."

The slip in the second sentence, of which the candid speaker seemed unaware, his confusion being on account of his own apparent discourtesy in the first two words, was glaring; but what really startled Wedmore was the consciousness of a sneaking sympathy with Miss Woodruff in her resentment. Confused in his turn, in his anxiety to reassure the worried young man, he had nearly blurted out that Miss Woodruff had said that she thought she should like him to buy Moorend, but checked the words in time.

"I think I can understand Miss Woodruff's feelings," he said paternally, and with more truth than he intended to convey; "if one has to leave the place one loves, the natural inclination is to get as far away from it as possible."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Woodruff without much conviction, and still in a tone of grievance; "though, when we discussed the matter vaguely, when we first heard that Moorend was to be sold, Beatrice seemed quite reconciled to the idea of living in Cleeve, or, at any rate, in Barstow. I should have said that a place like this"—he looked round the room—"would have suited her down to the ground. She has always said that she felt happy in Barstow, but now she seems to have turned against it."

Remembering that Miss Woodruff had told him emphatically that she loved Barstow, and unwilling to dwell upon the idea of the Pumphreys as the reason for her change of mind, Wedmore said briskly,

"Ah, but, you know, there's all the difference in

the world between discussing things vaguely and when it comes to the point ! ”

Evidently taking this as an excuse for his sister, Woodruff coloured again deeply, and said,

“ But you mustn’t think that Beatrice is a troublesome person. If I have given you that impression, I shall be sorry that I spoke about the matter at all. My only reason was a selfish anxiety to get things settled ; any uncertainty paralyses me. Nobody knows what I owe to Beatrice—though I think you can understand. She has always been too ready to adapt herself to my rather irregular ways—unpunctuality at meals and carelessness about money matters. The truth is, I suppose, that she has spoilt me ; and the consequence is that when she doesn’t see exactly eye to eye with me I go all to pieces. What really distresses me is the idea of separation after all these years—and the reason being for my benefit, if Sir John and Miss Pumphrey are successful in their kindness. It was always my father’s wish, you know, that Beatrice and I should live together, unless she married.”

“ There’s no likelihood of that, I suppose ? ” said Wedmore, who was feeling more and more paternal with this confiding young man.

“ No,” said Woodruff decidedly, “ I’m afraid there isn’t. Beatrice has had several offers, and there was one man, a sailor, whom she met at Stoke—at Lady Kelmscot’s—that I thought she cared for. Lady Kelmscot thought so too, and did what she could for him, but it came to nothing.”

With the assertion to himself that Miss Woodruff *was* a troublesome person, in more senses than one,

Wedmore said that no doubt she would find what she wanted in time, and led the conversation back to "Saint Michael and All Angels," speaking of Hilda's enthusiasm about it.

"Ah," said Woodruff, his dark face lighting up, "Miss Pumphrey is so *sure*"; adding hastily, "I don't mean that she may not be generously mistaken about the value of my work; what I mean is that she never seems to fumble at anything. She gives you confidence. Of course, I have not heard Miss Pumphrey sing, but, when we were trying over passages the other evening, I was struck by her absolute certainty of intonation—and, as I said, there are some awkward intervals. . . . That, you know," he added in a more professional tone, "is such a boon to a conductor, particularly in choral work; to know that there is one voice, at any rate, which will always land on the note in a lead. . . . I should say," he went on more shyly, "that Miss Pumphrey is like that in life; however unexpected the interval—the situation—she will always know how to tackle it."

Whether or not he intended a comparison with his sister, Wedmore felt it that way, and rose to it loyally.

"Yes," he said, trying not to sound complacent, and responding to Woodruff's familiar use of his sister's name, "Hilda is pretty sure." Leaving the precise object of her sureness to be assumed, and with the idea of Moorend and all it stood for at the back of his mind, he added, "It is rather a Pumphrey characteristic, you know."

Woodruff spoke eagerly of the value of certainty

to him in particular, music being so much a matter of feeling, of moods and fancies, that it encouraged one's natural tendency to indecision. His father, he said, had had the same idea about writing; and that was why he had occupied himself with farming as a corrective. He had also taken up carpentering for the same purpose; it gave him the right sort of discipline.

Unfortunately he, Martin, had no talent at all for practical affairs; away from the piano or organ his fingers were all thumbs, and he could never get a measurement right. He was as bad as a woman in that respect—except that he was clumsy. He guessed that he needed *his* corrective from other people. Without regretting his own, he envied Wedmore his profession. It must be a great thing to have one's practical and one's emotional capacities employed and developed in the same job.

Wedmore, on his part, surmised that when it came to the actual performance of a composer's work it amounted to pretty much the same thing. You tested your ideas against the capacities of the materials—the instruments—didn't you? That was why he was so keen that "Saint Michael and All Angels" should be performed—apart from the kudos it was bound to bring Woodruff. He should say that a composer whose work was not performed was pretty much in the position of an architect whose designs were never carried out. However much you knew, you couldn't really tell how the thing went on paper.

Incidentally, it was rather jolly that they should both owe their chances to the same people, the

Pumphreys. That was where people like the Pumphreys came in ; though they didn't all make such good use of their opportunities.

Thus they chopped logic and compliments on the surface, with, on Wedmore's part, some feeling of whistling in the dark to keep up his courage ; and also the suspicion that, from fear of the dark, he was not getting out of Woodruff what he really wanted of him. He was using him, rather, to legalise the idea of Miss Woodruff, to make her an honest woman ; though it was only in his imagination that she was dishonest.

The result of these efforts was a bright idea ; and when Woodruff, with confused apologies for the length of his visit, rose to go, Wedmore said,

“ I wonder if my mother could be of any use to Miss Woodruff ? She lives alone in the country, you know, down by the Quantocks, and she is getting old. I have often heard her express a wish for a young companion—somebody to share her interests in books and gardening, and to accompany her in her walks and drives. It would be quiet, but not dull, because my mother has a small circle of pleasant and interesting friends.”

Woodruff's relief and gratitude were almost disconcerting. “ It sounds the very thing,” he said. “ In spite of all she says, I am quite sure that Beatrice will never be really happy except in the country ; and, though she does not wear them on her sleeve, her tastes are all domestic. She loves pottering about.”

It was agreed that Wedmore should write to his mother, but that it would be better not to say

anything to Miss Woodruff until he had heard from her.

When, with some trepidation, Wedmore told Hilda of the proposal, she was both surprised and delighted.

“You are a dear!” she said, and confirmed it with a kiss. “Now, as Polly would say, you’re talking! I don’t mind telling you now that Miss Woodruff has been a good deal on my conscience. It seems so horrid that we should be doing all this for Mr. Woodruff, and getting so much fun out of it—Dr. Ingram has been at me to rejoin the Philharmonic, you know—while she is left out in the cold. Mother feels it, I’m sure; she took a great fancy to Miss Woodruff, and says that Carrie Archdale could not have understood her—though I tried to explain that what Carrie meant was rather a compliment than otherwise. It makes her so interesting. . . .

“There’s another thing, too,” she went on, pressing Wedmore’s arm. “I am inclined to think—and so is Carrie—that *you* are the cause of Miss Woodruff’s standoffishness. I discreetly tackled Mr. Woodruff about it the other evening, and though he would not give her away I could read between the lines of what he said. He is so ingenuous, poor fellow! So this will be a sort of amends.”

“Why, what on earth have I done to Miss Woodruff?” said Wedmore in astonishment.

“It isn’t what a man ‘does,’ you crude creature!” said Hilda with a laugh. “You *are* rather alarming in your manner, you know. I expect you were so wrapped up in the house that you didn’t notice her

—and girls like to be noticed. And I must say that if a young man—even an engaged young man—had treated me as you treated Miss Woodruff when we were at Moorend, I shouldn't exactly have jumped, at the prospect of meeting him again at dinner. . . . What was it you lectured her about the first time ? ”

“ Ships and sealing-wax,” said Wedmore, unwilling to go into a subject which Hilda would never understand, though he detected some curiosity under her amusement.

“ Oh, by the way, talking of ships,” said Hilda in a graver tone. “ Father was a little vexed to hear that you had formed an acquaintance with Dr. Shipton. He said that it was an old story, but that Dr. Shipton was not at all the sort of person to be encouraged. It appears that Woodruff was not altogether fortunate in his friends ; that some of them fastened on the wrong side of him. . . . Which,” she added, “ when you read his work, is quite understandable.”

The impression which Wedmore had received from dipping into “ Next to Nothing ” was that not only had the Pumphreys got Woodruff wrong, but that the novel itself might be said to be an ironical exposure of Pumphrey ideals. Woodruff's friends, with cruder methods of expression, might well be distasteful to Sir John Pumphrey. In any case, Wedmore had seen enough of local politics to attach no great importance to any difference between Sir John and Dr. Shipton. He told Hilda that he thought he had got Dr. Shipton's measure.

## CHAPTER XVII

“CLCK!” went Sir John Pumphrey, with an unspellable sound of hilarity, as, from behind, he clapped a heavy hand on Wedmore’s shoulder. “Ingram has not only agreed to produce ‘Saint Michael and All Angels,’ but he is inviting our young friend to conduct it!”

Wedmore turned to meet the beam of Sir John’s glasses, heightened to a glare, as he made a leg to the rear and stood off, crackling.

“I say, I am glad!” said Wedmore warmly.

“I know, I know,” said Sir John, waving aside the assurance as he prepared to tell his tale with chapter and verse. “At first,” he went on, deepening his voice, as he rocked on his heels and toes to the measure of his words, “the old scoundrel said that it wasn’t to be heard of. The work had merits, great merits, but these young men were going much too fast. London had lost its head, if it ever had one, and Stravinsky and Co. could lead it by the nose. It was the duty of the provinces to keep steady; to hold the fort with the classics until this craze for novelty had died a natural death—and so on and so forth.”

All this was delivered in a deep chant; and then, in a confidential murmur, Sir John continued,



“Then we told him—which was perfectly true—that our young friend thought of going to London; and we reminded him that native composers were rising stock at Queen’s Hall. He said he’d consult his committee; and found, of course, that Folkestone had nobbled them to a man. (That’s where Folkestone comes in,” he interpolated in a rapid parenthesis; “he has no ideas of his own, but you fill him up, and he goes on repeating it at intervals like a minute gun.) Then, and only then, we turned on Hilda. Ingram, you know, has been bleating after her like a sheep for its lamb ever since she gave up the Philharmonic; and so—and so—it’s to be put into rehearsal next week, my dear fellow!”

He ended with a crow, and what was almost a pirouette. Wedmore, who thought it extremely probable that Dr. Ingram had accepted the work on its merits, after an interview with Woodruff, when once he was assured that incidental expenses would be covered, knew Sir John too well not to play up to him; so he wagged his head in sympathy.

He had already observed that it was Sir John’s pleasure in affairs to affect the plus of rectitude—a sort of moral *entasis*—by pulling unnecessary strings; as a bishop will tell risky stories, or a business man will complicate a simple transaction with expensive luncheons. As if to confirm this impression, Sir John, taking his arm as they turned to move into the dining-room, went on in a tone of confidential surprise,

“Between ourselves, my dear boy, I gather that Ingram is really impressed. What was it he said?—something about an English Mozart with Russian

unexpectedness, or words to that effect. We must ask Hilda."

"I felt sure that Hilda was not mistaken," said Wedmore.

"Oh, so did I, so did I," said Sir John hastily; "and, though one doesn't profess to be a critic, one had one's own opinions. Still, it is gratifying to have one's opinions confirmed by an expert."

Hilda, who was already in the dining-room, received her lover's congratulations rather shyly.

"After all," she said, "it was you who told us about Mr. Woodruff, and all the rest was easy. Good wine needs no bush."

"Listen to her!" said her father with immense drollery, on his deepest note.

"I suppose," said Polly, when they had sat down to table, "you'll be taking the lead, Hilda?"

"There is no 'lead,' as you call it, my child," said Hilda rather acidly, "as you would have known if you had listened. There is only, in one place, a recitative for soprano."

"We had one," said Polly gracelessly, "but the wheels came off."

"But," said Lady Pumphrey, who seemed rather thoughtful than pleased at the news her husband had brought home, "you have agreed to rejoin the Philharmonic Society, haven't you?"

"I'm not sure, mumsie dear," said Hilda brightly. "I told Dr. Ingram that I would think about it. Choral work is rather trying, you know."

"Oh, but Hilda," said her father protestingly and soupily, "you can't let Woodruff down!"

Hilda looked at Wedmore, who, disappointed at

a hesitation so unusual in her, and, in his opinion, so uncalled for, said :

“ I’m sure Woodruff is reckoning on you ” ; and went on to quote what Woodruff had said about her certainty of attack.

“ Mr. Woodruff is very kind,” said Hilda, “ though I’m sure I don’t know how he knows.”

“ Better look out, Jim,” said Harry humorously ; and Polly said under her breath, “ That’s torn it ! ”

“ My dear people,” said Hilda good-humouredly, “ you are very silly—and *rather* vulgar. Not you, Jim ; you understand. Anybody would think we had helped Mr. Woodruff to compose ‘ Saint Michael and All Angels.’ Jim told us about it, and it was a privilege to be able to do anything to make it known ; but Mr. Woodruff is quite capable of making his own arrangements with Dr. Ingram about the performance. He doesn’t need anybody to hold his hand, so to speak.”

“ Polly, be quiet ! ” said Sir John, in a tone comically unlike his usual recitative ; and Wedmore said,

“ They were only pulling our legs, Hilda. If you ask me, it is worth every sacrifice to make the thing a success. It isn’t in my line, but I can quite see that, apart from what he said about your singing, it will be a great advantage to Woodruff to have somebody in the chorus who has a general idea of the work from the beginning.”

“ Well, if you really think so—— ” said Hilda, and so the matter dropped.

Afterwards, however, when they were alone in the loggia, walking up and down in the pleasantly

cool air of the October evening, Hilda said to Wedmore,

“I warned you that you would have to put up with the devastating family joke. It is a little difficult to speak plainly in the presence of one’s family, but, as I expect you guessed, my hesitation was not on account of Mr. Woodruff’s *beaux yeux*. Father is a dear, and he has behaved beautifully, but he *has* a local reputation for making the most of reflected glory, and it seemed to me better that, having done what we could, we should gracefully retire and let Mr. Woodruff and Dr. Ingram have all the credit. In the case of Dr. Ingram it would be policy, and—well, the Woodruffs don’t strike me as the sort of people who like patronage.”

“I’m sure you mistake Woodruff,” said Wedmore emphatically. “He is the simplest creature in the world, and his feelings towards both you and your father are those of the purest gratitude. He will be proud to have your assistance, and he would be deeply disappointed if you backed out.”

“Oh, I’m not backing out,” said Hilda, “not now that I have promised *you*.”

For once, thought Wedmore, Hilda *had* fumbled at an interval; and he wondered why, with the uncomfortable feeling that, in spite of her quite plausible explanation, she had been a little uncertain of him on the lines of her brother’s silly remark. To clear up any hesitation of that sort which might be lingering in her mind, he said, as he lit a cigarette,

“By the way, speaking of patronage, I have heard from my mother. She seems quite attracted by the idea of Miss Woodruff. She even asks what I think

about the question of terms. Now, the point is that, unlike her brother, Miss Woodruff does strike me as the sort of person one must go warily with."

"Oh, I don't know," said Hilda rather coldly. "After all, when you are turning people out of their house, you do owe them a sort of obligation. At any rate, it would seem natural that you should think so."

"Well," said Wedmore, waiving the inaccuracy about turning people out, since the Woodruffs had to go, anyhow, "do you think you could concoct a letter to Miss Woodruff that wouldn't put her back up? You might say that my mother had been looking out for somebody——"

"You silly boy!" said Hilda, stopping his mouth with a kiss. "The whole point of the thing is that the offer should come from *you*. Miss Woodruff and I got on famously; we don't need an olive branch; it is you and she that have to kiss and be friends. Not literally, you wretch—and I'm inclined to think that—oh, yes, *I* know, we talked about *building*, didn't we?—and perhaps it would be more in order if you didn't write to Miss Woodruff herself. But you should certainly approach her brother—particularly since you have already spoken to him about it."

In spite of, or rather because of, her high-pitched manner, Wedmore felt the little reproach in her allusion to building; though, until now, Hilda had never seemed to mind his professional reserve with her; and that made him all the more ready to agree with her suggestion—though he doubted if it were a

wise one. Not because he believed that Miss Woodruff's resentment was really against himself—he did not think it was against Hilda personally, though everything pointed to its being against the Pumphreys—but because, knowing Hilda's friendly powers, he thought that the more direct communication there was between her and Miss Woodruff the better for all concerned; particularly since the future relations between Woodruff and the Pumphreys were now likely to be pretty close. He said he would do what he could, though he was no hand at social diplomacy, and Hilda said that he was a perfect darling in every respect.

Never before had she been so demonstrative; but Wedmore, though he liked the demonstrations, and could find reason enough for her exalted mood in her father's news about "Saint Michael and All Angels," was a little troubled. It seemed to him that, for the first time in their engagement, they were bluffing; playing a sort of double confidence-trick. Aware of his own reserve about Miss Woodruff, he took all the blame, and returned Hilda's endearments with a compunction which was all the more acute because his wish to hasten their marriage seemed to have waned—as if something must be straightened out first.

Wedmore wrote to Woodruff, telling him of his mother's letter, taking the same opportunity to congratulate Woodruff warmly on the acceptance of "Saint Michael and All Angels"; and received a reply which perplexed him. Miss Woodruff, it appeared, had already made arrangements to go to London to stay with an aunt, her father's unmarried

sister, in St. John's Wood ; was, indeed, going the following week.

There was nothing surprising in the facts ; it had been agreed that nothing should be said to Miss Woodruff until Wedmore had heard from his mother, and it was natural enough that she should make her plans directly the matter of the Symphony had been settled. It was the tone of the letter which perplexed Wedmore. Woodruff, while thanking Wedmore for his congratulations and for his mother's offer, and repeating his own indebtedness to the Pumphreys, wrote with constraint ; almost as if the resentment against Wedmore which Hilda attributed to Miss Woodruff had extended to her brother. Until then, Wedmore had hardly realised what a liking he had taken to the young man, and the letter pained him.

When he showed the letter to Hilda, she read it very carefully, and he could see from her expression that she felt its constraint.

"Oh, well," she said, after reading it through again, "we've done all we can. Evidently Miss Woodruff does not mean to be civil to her brother's friends. I shouldn't be surprised if that Dr. Shipton were at the bottom of it. He struck me as a disagreeable old person."

With no wish to defend Miss Woodruff or Dr. Shipton, Wedmore could not help protesting. He pointed out, he felt sure unnecessarily, that the lack of cordiality was not in the facts but in the tone of the letter.

"My dear man," said Hilda compassionately, though crossly, "Mr. Woodruff is only a mouthpiece. He

couldn't say 'Bo!' to a goose—except in music, poor dear!”

The last was true enough. “Saint Michael and All Angels” had been already put into rehearsal in preparation for the Philharmonic Society's concert in January, and everybody concerned in it was enthusiastic, both about the work itself and about Woodruff's powers as a conductor. At the desk all his nervousness disappeared; he was quiet but firm, exacting but good-humoured.

Miss Archdale, who sang with the contraltos, was particularly loud in his praises. She said that Hilda was a lucky woman to have such power of inspiring confidence.

Hilda was evidently getting the keenest enjoyment not only from the prospect of what seemed likely to be a great success, but out of the music itself. She scoffed at Wedmore's idea that Woodruff didn't like him, and made every opportunity to bring the two together. Wedmore was willing enough, and Woodruff was too polite to show reluctance; but Wedmore continued to feel in his manner—not, indeed, dislike—but embarrassment.

There was evidently a misunderstanding of some sort, and Hilda, unable to ignore it, behaved with her usual directness.

“My poor dear,” she said to Wedmore, on the day following a rehearsal, “as Polly would say, you *have* torn it, somehow. I simply couldn't rest until I had tackled Mr. Woodruff, and at last he admitted that his sister is offended with you—so much offended that, when he told her of your mother's offer, she positively eried with temper, though she couldn't,



or wouldn't, explain why. He confessed—to me, to me! the candid soul—that, just for a moment, he wondered if you had insulted her; but when he hinted as much to her she turned her fury on *him*. He can only suppose that you must have snubbed her the first time you went to Moorend—and he *did* notice that when he was talking to you about her you seemed unsympathetic.”

Wedmore was compelled to accept this; but, unless Miss Woodruff could read thoughts which he concealed even from himself, he failed to see how he could have offended her. Nor, unless Woodruff still harboured the preposterous idea that Wedmore had insulted his sister, was his own embarrassment explained; because his own account of her had been that of an unreasonable person. Incidentally, Wedmore would have been glad if Hilda had seemed less pleased at the explanation.

## CHAPTER XVIII

WITH the departure of Miss Woodruff for London, and Hilda's enthusiastic absorption in "Saint Michael and All Angels," Wedmore was conscious of a sort of lull—as when undecided persons to whom some attention is due have at last settled their arrangements. He felt relieved of some responsibility, though he could not have said what. Certainly he owed none to Miss Woodruff; but, supposing she had a grievance against him, it was convenient to have her at such a distance that he need not consider how to behave to her.

As for Hilda, he was quite sure that her new interest did not make him feel in the least "out of it" with her; on the contrary, it seemed to make their relations more comfortable; and he was more than ever convinced of the advantage to young women of some definite occupation. For one thing, though he would not, perhaps, have put it so bluntly, it helped to divert their curiosity from one's own affairs.

In the lull, Wedmore discovered with relief what it was that had interfered with his wish to hasten his marriage. It was nothing whatever to do with Hilda. The truth was that, since his engagement,

he had, if not advanced, at any rate changed considerably in his professional ideas, and this was his first real opportunity to take stock of them. His success with the Institute had, for the moment, turned his head, and diverted him from the research and experiment which were necessary to his career; and his engagement to Sir John Pumphrey's daughter, with the dazzling prospects of "influence" which had followed, had carried him on a little too far in one direction.

Wedmore saw, now, that if he were to make the best use of his powers, he must be more discriminating in his choice among the fruits of influence, even at some risk of disappointing his future father-in-law. The Institute, and Sir John's enthusiastic patronage of him, had put him rather in the position of a fashionable portrait painter—with all the risks to quality involved in it.

In the first flush of his engagement Wedmore had taken all the commissions which had come to him, irrespective of whether or not they served his particular bent and conduced to his more solid reputation as well as immediate popularity. Some of these commissions had, indeed, strained his professional conscience and exposed him to the chaff of his partner; but they were profitable, and he could hardly refuse them without offending Sir John, since they had come from his friends and at his introduction.

Wedmore was grateful to Sir John, but he could not help seeing that though Sir John understood success he did not understand how it was achieved through architecture. Like most business men, he trusted too much to the pulling of strings; and

Wedmore was not sorry that he had found another opportunity for the exercise in "Saint Michael and All Angels."

The situation for Wedmore, in fact, was a reversal of what often happens when the patron's attention is turned away. It was an opportunity for truancy, not from work but in favour of it to the disregard of immediate results. Nor did Wedmore have it on his conscience that in playing truant from success, as Sir John understood it, he would be really going against Sir John's and Hilda's wishes for him.

Money was not what they wanted; indeed, Sir John's pleasure and pride in the engagement were partly dependent upon the fact that Hilda was not marrying a rich man; and Hilda would have a sufficient income of her own. Success itself was what they wanted; and if, working under cover of "Saint Michael and All Angels," so to speak, Wedmore could present them with success achieved in his own way, they would be just as pleased with it as if it had come to him through the Pumphrey influence. Whatever success it were, the Institute would still be its monument.

In this revision of his opportunities Wedmore had the support of his partner. There was plenty of building to be done in Barstow and Cleeve, and, in the long run, the firm would not lose financially by taking things at a slower pace. Roberts had no architectural scruples beyond figures, but he had an eye to the long run, and a shrewd idea of the conditions in which Wedmore would be, as he put it, "a stayer."

With as good a command of styles as most,

Wedmore's particular bent was for the constructive use of materials, particularly new materials ; and his pleasure in commissions was determined largely by the opportunity they presented for putting his ideas in this direction into practice. As he got more familiar with Barstow and its resources, Wedmore saw that he was dealing roughly with two classes of clients : those who wanted something showy, and those who would allow him to build closely to their practical needs. When, in taking stock of his position with an eye to the future, he began to consider the matter, he was struck by the fact that, if he owed most of the former to Sir John, an increasing number of the latter were coming to him through Stuckey.

Wedmore and Stuckey had begun by quarrelling over the Institute ; but, little by little, by talking with the gloves off, they had come to an argumentative understanding of mutual esteem. Stuckey was a barbarian, but he knew his job as a building contractor, and Wedmore was not ashamed to admit that he had learned a great deal from him. On the other hand, Stuckey, when he found that Wedmore was not a mere "artist," showed himself willing to listen to pleas for the amenities of building—even when Wedmore quoted his own villas as awful warnings.

The result was that Stuckey had got into the habit of consulting him about the best way of carrying out practical problems without offending the eye ; and in a very short time he was bringing Wedmore exactly the sort of commissions he wanted with a view to their common benefit. There was, for

example, a block of warehouses in steel and reinforced concrete, down by the harbour, which afforded as pretty a problem as Wedmore could have desired.

At first the knowledge of the civic rivalry between Stuckey and Sir John Pumphrey made Wedmore a little shy in his dealings with the contractor; but when he dropped hints of them to Sir John he found him very reasonable. Sir John was too good a man of business to claim loyalty at professional expense; and, moreover, it was only in affairs of the Council that the two men really clashed, Sir John being one of the new Tory Progressives with what his daughter Polly called a come-hither eye to Labour, while Stuckey was a hard-shell Radical with uncompromising views about the British working-man. Outside municipal affairs they hardly came into contact; and, socially, they were in different worlds.

The unofficial, and more or less winked at, comradeship between Polly Pumphrey and Gilbert Stuckey only emphasised the social gulf between the two families, since, for the Pumphreys, at any rate, it afforded material for indulgent humour in Polly's plebeian tastes. Gilbert Stuckey, just down from Oxford, being a high-nosed youth of languid manners and extremely aristocratic appearance, some of the humour might be called unconscious.

On second thoughts Wedmore had said nothing to Polly by way of cautioning her against talking to the Stuckeys about her father's interest in Moor-end. There was no sense in putting ideas into her head. Not only that, but the memory of Polly's thoughtful glance at him at the dinner-table when

the subject of Moorend was first discussed, and what Hilda had said about her championship of Miss Woodruff against Miss Archdale, made him rather shy of mentioning Moorend to her. The mere fact that Polly never mentioned Moorend to him was proof that she had some private reflections about the place. Polly was very inquisitive, but when she was most inquisitive she left off asking questions.

In one respect Polly might be said to be her father inverted: that, whereas he took a pride in pulling unnecessary strings, she sought her advantage in grinding axes. That Polly was grinding some axe of her own now seemed likely enough; and, knowing her way of using irrelevant people to serve as grindstones, Wedmore thought it inadvisable to remind her of Moorend and the Woodruffs.

The particular axe came out on a Saturday afternoon when, on his way to call for Hilda, Wedmore encountered Polly and Gilbert Stuckey in oily consultation over a dismembered motor-bicycle and side-car on the Western Road outside the gate of Riverside. They had been for a run without incident, but on their return the combination of a gas-meter and a sewing-machine, as Polly described it, had "gone all of a tiz-woz."

Gilbert Stuckey, who had excellent manners and, at the moment, a long scratch on his high nose, greeted Wedmore with melancholy politeness and bowed again to his task; while Polly, from her seat on the bank, continued to gird him with technicalities misapplied. Lady Pumphrey, who liked Gilbert, had been expecting him to tea, but the time had passed in repairs, and he must be off as soon as

he could get the machine going. Wedmore lent him a hand, and when, after the usual stuttering and stammering, the machine found itself with disconcerting suddenness and bore Gilbert smoothly away, Polly linked her arm affectionately in Wedmore's and said, as they turned in at the gate,

"Wouldn't like to have the Filbert in your office, I suppose?"

"I don't know; why?" said Wedmore.

"Pa Stuckey wants to send him to Liverpool," said Polly.

Amused at the inadequacy of the reason, Wedmore said, "But does the Filbert want to be an architect?"

"He's got to go into his father's business sooner or later," said Polly, "but the old man thinks he ought to have experience away from home. Come on; he'd love to be with you, and I heard you say you thought of taking an artied pupil."

Wondering if Polly herself was the reason why Mr. Stuckey thought that Gilbert ought to have experience away from home, but struck by a certain amount of common sense in the idea of introducing architectural training into a contractor's business, Wedmore said,

"Well, shall I speak to Mr. Stuckey about it?"

"Not on your life," said Polly hastily. "You leave Pa Stuckey to me. All you've got to do is to stand by in case you're wanted."

With the reflection that there could be no harm in trying the young man, though with a wary sense of possible complications with Sir John Pumphrey on Polly's account, Wedmore said that he would



stand by. In the interval he would sound Lady Pumphrey as to the official as distinct from the humorous view of the friendship between Polly and Gilbert. The discovery that he was being used as one of Polly's grindstones for this particular axe relieved his mind about her interest in Moorend; though he wondered exactly what she meant when she said, as they parted at the door,

"Polly can see through a brick wall, and she doesn't forget her friends."

Altogether, though he had not been idle since his engagement, Wedmore felt as if he were only now settling down to work. Hilda chaffed him occasionally about the humdrum nature of his more recent commissions, saying that her artist had turned into an engineer, but she did not seem disappointed in him. The most exacting lover could not have accused Hilda of caring for him for any reason but himself. Probably, thought Wedmore complacently, her artistic interest, which had been, if anything, a disturbing factor in their relations—since art in connection with building meant an entirely different thing to him and Hilda—was now being comfortably absorbed in an art which she really understood.

## CHAPTER XIX

WITH the near approach of the sale of Moorend, Wedmore sometimes wondered if Sir John Pumphrey were not taking it rather too much for granted. It was true that there did not seem to be any other keen bidders in the field, but there was no saying what might happen at auction. Sir John's purchase, if it came off, being on his behalf, Wedmore felt some delicacy about discussing prospects with him; and Sir John, having made up his mind, said no more about the matter; but Wedmore continued to keep his eyes open in case of accidents.

His own idea was that Hilda would be happier in the neighbourhood of Cleeve than anywhere else, and that her attraction to Moorend was as superficial as her artistic interest in his work, and as easily and comfortably removable. He could not have put it into precise language, but it seemed to him that Hilda had already got what she wanted out of Moorend; that mere residence in the house would have been an anti-climax for her—plus the material inconveniences which he had foreseen at his first visit.

Correspondingly, he would have been unable to say whether he himself did or did not want to live

at Moorend. He was afraid that what it really amounted to was that he did not want to live there with Hilda. When the Pumphreys had jumped at Moorend, he had accepted the idea with the stoical determination to bear the private consequences to himself—the haunting of Miss Woodruff; but, with the adoption of Woodruff into the Pumphrey circle, and the departure of Miss Woodruff for London, the whole subject of Moorend seemed to have been relegated to the basement of his mind. He would hardly have been surprised to hear that Moorend was legendary, or a figment of his unguarded imagination.

Consequently, it was with a queer sense of unreality, as of castles in Spain, that he accompanied Sir John Pumphrey to the auction room of Messrs. Till and Sapperton on the day of the sale. Sir John, on the other hand, seemed to be conscious chiefly of the reality of himself—as if Moorend were to be taken in his stride. It may have been, of course, that he did not want to make too much of what was, after all, intended as a gift to the young man beside him; but, as they made their way through a November drizzle which intensified Wedmore's feeling of the unreality of their errand, he talked rather ostentatiously about other subjects.

“*Here—we are!*” he said, with his falling intonation and slight pause for a quick survey of the ground, as he stood aside to let Wedmore precede him into the muddy passage of Till and Sapperton's. It was as if he had only now recalled his mind to the business in hand. Wedmore, for his part, was thinking of all the unexpected and disturbing consequences of

his order to view. He had viewed considerably more than he had bargained for, and he was prepared to find Mr. Till looking sardonic.

The auction room was on the first floor, and as they went up the narrow stairs Sir John remarked that he hoped Mr. Till would put up Moorend early in the list, as he had some rather important business to get through that afternoon. The tone in which he said it, slightly stressing "important," made Wedmore feel that Sir John had only brought him there to show him how easily minor Pumphrey affairs were managed.

There were, indeed, several properties to be disposed of besides Moorend, and all the chairs facing the auctioneer's desk were already occupied. Wedmore, to whom the experience was new, was struck by the general effect of moral isolation at comparatively close physical quarters. It oddly reversed the feeling of a church or chapel congregation—which the look of the people suggested. There were a good many women, and people talked to their neighbours, but with a stiff turn of the head, as if the occasion demanded extra politeness.

As Wedmore and Sir John passed behind the rows, a stout man offered Sir John his chair; but with a "Not for worlds!" Sir John pushed Wedmore before him to the left, and they took up their places in a group against the wall at the back of the room.

The word "Moorend," in bold black-letter type to mark the antiquity of the place, on one of a row of six bills on the wall above the auctioneer's desk, brought back reality to Wedmore, with a difference. In the grimy, gassy room, which managed to be both

chilly and stuffy, the word was like the call of romance. Since he had first seen it, the word had acquired meanings in the depths of his nature, and a whole set of impulses and intuitions had grouped themselves round it; and to see it now, with cold feet and hot head, was like having the secrets of his heart revealed.

Wedmore would hardly have been surprised if Sir John, who murmured comments on the room at his elbow, had suddenly recoiled from him and denounced him as a traitor to Hilda. For he knew now that the secret of Moorend was the secret woman. That his conscious feeling towards her was resentment, rather than love, did not affect her power or the meaning of the occasion. Her shrine was to be held at auction in his presence and, possibly, for the benefit of her rival.

The glass doors on the right of the room opened, and Mr. Till came through, with a smile for everybody but favour to none, followed by two young clerks, with ledgers, from whom there was clearly nothing to hope. They settled themselves, Mr. Till lightly, they with legal solemnity, at their desks; and then Mr. Till, ignoring the ladies, sketched out for the gentlemen the business of the afternoon, with genial asides upon the opportunities presented.

Moorend came fourth on the list, so that Wedmore was able to become familiar with procedure before his personal feelings were engaged. Under the stern eyes of the young clerks he found himself steeling his ears against Mr. Till's eloquence lest an unwary movement should saddle him with a farm or a foundry. They seemed to be allocated at something

less than a nod or a wink ; and he could now understand the guarded atmosphere of the assembly. Every now and then somebody got up and stole out of the room with the air of having escaped a great danger.

Amused at these reflections, on the surface of his mind, Wedmore heard Mr. Till talking about Moorend before he realised that he had come to it. Mr. Till, with his eyes down, as if to avoid Sir John's, and the apologetic smile of the strong man who dwells for a moment on matters of sentiment, had a great deal to say about Moorend. He spoke of its history and associations, and the architectural beauties of the house, but rather as if these were incidental merits. It was the land that he would have his hearers remember ; good pasture land, and land eminently suitable for building.

As, with what Wedmore felt to be the effect of doing his duty at the cost of his pleasure, Mr. Till enlarged upon the land, and drew attention to the plan of the estate in the catalogue, Sir John fidgeted and fumed in his beard, glancing round in pained astonishment as if his presence must have been overlooked.

Mr. Till finished his tale with a deprecating wave of his hand, and said, " Now, gentlemen, what am I offered for Moorend ? "

" Fifteen hundred," said Sir John in a clear voice.

" Fifteen hundred, sixteen hundred, seventeen hundred," murmured Mr. Till complacently, as the bidding ran up. " I am offered eighteen—nineteen—two thousand pounds for Moorend."

At two thousand five hundred the bidding hung

for a moment, and Mr. Till repeated the sum encouragingly. Then, with the faintest flicker of surprise at a bid from a fresh corner of the room, he said,

“Two thousand seven hundred.”

Before he spoke, Sir John, quicker than Wedmore to catch the direction of the bid, had craned forward to glance at a group by the door which had formed since the sale started. Following his eyes, and observing their sudden indignant bulge, Wedmore saw Stuckey, in his usual depressed attitude, in a mackintosh, with pince-nez at the end of his nose, and both hands resting on his umbrella planted before him.

“Three thousand,” said Sir John quickly, and so obviously rattled that heads turned to look.

“Three thousand one hundred,” said Mr. Till equably, acknowledging the fresh bid from Stuckey.

Then Wedmore, watching Sir John, saw in his face indignation change to what he could have sworn to be fear. He looked round to see Dr. Shipton, beside Stuckey, gazing at Sir John under his brows with his usual quizzical expression.

“Three thousand one hundred,” repeated Mr. Till warningly; “shall I say——? Three thousand one hundred: Mr. Stuckey.”

Sir John, even if he meant to bid further, had hesitated too long.

“It’s a conspiracy!” he exclaimed; and Mr. Till, though he could hardly have caught the actual words, looked up reprovingly. Sir John recovered himself immediately and murmured to Wedmore, with a hand on his arm, in a tone that was both

jocular and apologetic, "No, no—even for you, my dear fellow—there are limits to what one can afford!"

Wedmore's first impression was a confused feeling of surprise at the lack of public interest in a contest in which so much of him had been involved, for Mr. Till was already describing the next lot; his next the conviction that, but for the presence of Dr. Shipton, Sir John would have continued to bid against Stuckey in sheer rivalry. He had been thrown off his balance. Equally sure was the conviction that any chagrin which Sir John might feel at losing Moorend would be swallowed on account of Dr. Shipton. Whatever the old quarrel between the two men, it was clear that Dr. Shipton had the advantage.

It was only when, with a not unfriendly nod from Sir John to Stuckey, they had passed the door, that Wedmore was conscious in himself of a great relief that Moorend was not to be his future home.



## CHAPTER XX

HILDA, as Wedmore had half expected, was not so disappointed at the loss of Moorend as her father said she would be.

“Oh, well,” she said good-humouredly, “one can’t have everything. It would have been delightful to live in a moated grange, so to speak—particularly since it is going to have the associations of two famous men; but I daresay we shall be more comfortable in a modern house.”

Her beaming face, as she stood warming one foot at the log fire, and her candid allusion to Woodruff in the remark about two famous men, made Wedmore feel secretive by contrast. He wished that all his mental processes were as above-board as Hilda’s appeared to be. For her a house was a house, with nothing behind it.

She had spent the afternoon golfing in the rain, and her cheeks were as fresh as a child’s.

“Besides,” she went on, with a considering smile at Wedmore’s face, which he could not help feeling to be rather piously subdued to the tone of Sir John’s announcement, which had just been made, “it is no use pretending that you are not, on the whole, rather glad. Moorend belongs to the things

which you cannot share, and I should have been an intruder."

It was true, though not quite in the sense intended, the jest being at his professional reticence—or, rather, inability to explain to Hilda what pleased him professionally at Moorend; and Wedmore felt himself colour, though he laughed.

Sir John, who had been watching his daughter complacently, with his hands on his hips, glanced at Wedmore and echoed his laugh with a faint, "Ha, ha!" which betrayed abstraction. In making his announcement to his wife and daughter, Sir John had not mentioned Dr. Shipton, but had merely said that the price of Moorend was too steep.

"The old scoundrel," he said, meaning Stuckey, "intends to build. Otherwise he wouldn't have run to it. I have no doubt he will pull Moorend down—unless he turns the place into a tea-garden. Well, we gave him a run for his money."

Wedmore felt now that, his attention attracted by Hilda's remark, Sir John was thinking about his acquaintance with Shipton, which had never been mentioned between them. He saw, too, or thought he saw, with grim amusement, the reason why Sir John had never mentioned it. The old quarrel, whatever it was, would never come to the surface, because Shipton had the advantage somewhere. Sir John would do anything rather than rake it up.

Wedmore did not believe, however, that Shipton's presence that afternoon, though it could hardly have been accidental, proved the conspiracy between him and Stuckey which Sir John had unguardedly

asserted. That was a slip—a remarkable slip in so careful a man. If Stuckey had been prompted to bid for Moorend by anything more than his own hard-headed sense of a good opportunity for building, Wedmore thought he could put his finger on the prompter—though the idea of besting Sir John might have weighed as well.

Wedmore's opinion of the possible prompter was encouraged when Polly came in, the last as usual, pulling up her stockings abstractedly, but glancing at her father with the expectant eyes and open mouth of one who awaits the official release of news already known. Polly could not have heard her father's announcement, which had been made only ten minutes or so before, but Wedmore was willing to bet that she knew how the sale had gone. When, in response to a nudge and a whisper, Hilda told her, she went rather white and said, "Hard lines!"

Her expression and movement, as she went and sat down beside her mother, reminded Wedmore of a kitten that has brought down a piece of china. Evidently, though, what really scared her was the absence of a row.

During dinner Sir John, who had been unusually quiet and thoughtful, said to Wedmore, "By the way, didn't Woodruff say here that nobody in particular had been out to look at Moorend?"

Before Wedmore, taken a little aback at the pointed "here," could reply, Hilda said warmly,

"I'm quite sure, father, that if Mr. Woodruff had known that Mr. Stuckey was after Moorend he would have told us."

"Well, you might just ask him," said Sir John, with comical meekness for him.

"Indeed, father, I can't undertake to do anything so silly and offensive," said Hilda, sitting up very straight and looking at him with a sparkle in her sea-green eyes and a spot of red in either cheek. "Why should you look for explanations of what was a perfectly natural thing? Moorend was advertised all over the place. Good riddance to Moorend, so far as I am concerned."

In spite of her dignified appearance, even splendid appearance, under this emotion, it was the comparison of the hen and chickens that occurred to Wedmore. Hilda's anger was protective. Harry said, "Tut, tut!" but Polly, after a scared glance at Hilda, looked down her nose, and went on with her dinner with nervous alacrity.

At the moment, Wedmore thought Hilda's little flare-up natural and proper; she was a loyal friend; and he envied her the freedom of mind which enabled her to stand up for Woodruff. It was only on reflection, as the meal progressed in an uncomfortable silence, that the flare-up seemed a little excessive. It suggested that, for all her cheerful acquiescence in the loss of Moorend, Hilda was a bit edgy about it. "Good riddance!" was protesting too much.

They were all, except Harry, thought Wedmore gloomily, a bit edgy about Moorend; for Lady Pumphrey was evidently perturbed at the calm way in which her husband accepted his defeat. The natural and healthy thing for him to do was to bluster. Not that Wedmore was worried about Sir John; except in his pride, the loss of Moorend wouldn't

hurt him, and would probably save his pocket. The facts were nothing ; it was the way they were all wondering and wondering about what, as Hilda said, was a perfectly natural thing, that exasperated Wedmore—all the more because he was the only one of them with reasons for mental reserves about Moorend. It made him feel the villain of the piece, though he had done nothing.

If anybody had done anything, it was Polly ; and Wedmore, as he phrased it to himself, could have smacked her head—all the more readily because he could not get rid of the feeling that Polly had a notion of his mental reserves about Moorend.

To complete Wedmore's discomfort, Miss Archdale came in after dinner. Inspired by a new frock in black and yellow, which became her tragic style, she talked accordingly, yearning up to Hilda, and trying to draw Wedmore out about his work. Lately, she said, they had all been absorbed in "Saint Michael and All Angels," but they must not forget the more useful arts.

When she left, Wedmore could not without rudeness avoid offering his escort. Lady Pumphrey offered the car, but Miss Archdale said that she preferred to walk to her tram. The night had turned frosty. Hilda dismissed the pair at the gate with a "Bless you, my children!" aimed, as Wedmore knew, at his holy terror in Miss Archdale's company.

"Isn't Hilda splendid!" said she, as they were crossing the bridge.

Wedmore agreed to the general statement, but wondered as to its particular intention. He was

aware, now, that Miss Archdale had some special reason for his company.

"I've never known her so gloriously happy," Miss Archdale went on, lifting her face to the stars. "It almost frightens one."

Wedmore intimated that, for his part, he could bear Hilda's happiness with equanimity.

"Ah, that is because you are a man," said Miss Archdale, half indulgently and half admiringly. "Because Hilda is so brave, you take her at her own valuation; you think life is easy for her; and I daresay you would put her down as lacking in sensibility." After a pause, she added, "Though, indeed, I doubt if Hilda herself knows her own nature."

"Is there anything wrong?" said Wedmore, amused rather than disturbed.

"Life, Mr. Wedmore," said Miss Archdale oracularly, as she flung the end of her wrap over her shoulder with a classical gesture, "is never wrong."

He made the only possible comment, "Then, what about it?"

"It is a commonplace," Miss Archdale went on, in tones measured by her walk, as if she continued her last remark without regard to the flippant interruption, "to talk about women's need for strength. Yes, that is too true. But we must not forget that some women, the big self-reliant women like Hilda, feel an equal need for weakness—or, at any rate, for somebody to support and encourage, to lean upon them. Hence her radiant happiness just now."

"You mean Mr. Woodruff?" he said bluntly, seeing no reason for beating about the bush.

"You, Mr. Wedmore, if I may say so, do not lean," murmured Miss Archdale in an intimate aside, as she turned her shrouded head to him under the last light of the bridge.

"Well, then, what's the matter?" said Wedmore rather impatiently, for it seemed to him that the comparison was irrelevant.

"Nothing *can* be the matter if we are only true to ourselves," she said in soft reproof of his crudeness. "As I said, life—*life* is never wrong. It is only that——" She broke off to exclaim, as one throwing herself upon the generosity of his understanding, "Oh, don't you know, Mr. Wedmore, how dependent one may become upon the very person who claims one's support?"

The general truth of this did not seem to make it any more probable in the particular case, and Wedmore said,

"Well, Mr. Woodruff doesn't strike me as the sort of person to claim or expect anything more. He is wrapped up in his music."

"Ah, it isn't what he claims, it's what he provides," said Miss Archdale, with a quick hand on his arm; "and what you—pardon me—don't. You are so strong!"

"Has Hilda complained?" said Wedmore, against his inclination, but determined to keep the discursive lady to the point, now that they had got so far.

"Hilda would never complain—not even to me!" said Miss Archdale in ringing tones. "She would eat her heart out first! Nor has she anything to complain of. Life is life, and we are what we are. Many women would be more than satisfied; would

take and be thankful, knowing well that the strongest man has his moments—his moments of need. Oh, I am not saying that Hilda is dissatisfied with you ; she does not know—not yet. She is happy without knowing what makes her happy. And, please, please, don't think that I am blaming you for anything that you have done or left undone ; I, at any rate, can see that even *you* sometimes feel the need of a woman's understanding—possibly more than you know yourself."

She added, in a rapid parenthesis, in an impersonal tone, "That is where so many men—particularly intellectual men—make mistakes. There are always plenty of women who seem to offer the understanding that they need ; women who trade upon the momentary weakness of the strong man ; Delilahs who encourage him to betray the secret of his strength. . . . But, *non ragioniam di lor*, you know what I mean. . . ."

With a hazy memory of "Codlin's the friend, not Short," Wedmore said, "Well, Miss Archdale, what is it that you want me to do ?"

"I don't want you to do anything, Mr. Wedmore," she said, quickening her pace as they came in sight of the tram terminus, and speaking as if the more rapid movement inspired her. "All I ask is that you should be considerate of Hilda's need of *your* need of her ; your need of her in your work as well as in your—your play. Confide in her ; let her see that she is as necessary to you as an artist as she is as a man—if you can pass that horrible sentence—but I mustn't miss my tram ! *That* is what is making Hilda so happy now—the unconscious



enjoyment of her own sympathy and understanding. Don't, don't let her feel a blank when this opportunity comes to an end, as it must, as it should. Not that there is the least danger in it, in itself; on the contrary, if you play your part well, if you are true to yourself, it will give you a fuller, richer, nobler Hilda, a more complete Hilda than you had before. . . . Above all, if I may so venture, remember that, whatever happens, I am always here. In music, Hilda needs no interpreter, she understands; but it may well be that, in your sterner art, the accidents of my training and habits of mind may give me some slight advantage. At any rate, promise me that if ever you are troubled about Hilda you will confide in me—and forgive me if I have said anything to disturb you to-night. . . . Here is my tram!”

Wedmore assured her that he was not disturbed, and let the promise be taken for granted by passive submission to the fervent pressure of her hand. Miss Archdale's remarks about himself did not strike him as anything more than a hectic commentary upon his disinclination to be drawn out that evening; and, as for the allusion to Woodruff, that was only Miss Archdale's elaborate version of the devastating family joke—though even less convenient. Hilda made no secret whatever of her protective interest in Woodruff; her little flare-up at the table had been followed by no sign of embarrassment on her part.

Between the lines of Miss Archdale's harangue, however, in the allusion to Delilahs, Wedmore did read some curiosity about his regard for Miss Woodruff; and, remembering what she had said about

her to the Pumphreys, he thought it possible that Miss Archdale was trying to make some mischief in that direction, though he couldn't imagine why. But that only amused him. If the conversation influenced him at all, it was to make him slightly defiant about the association between Hilda and Woodruff which he had hitherto taken for granted.

In the comparative silence after parting from Miss Archdale, as Wedmore continued his way to his lodgings, his mind went back to Moorend. It gained enormously by contrast with the edginess of the evening culminating in Miss Archdale's outburst. He perceived now what had escaped him in his feeling of relief that he was not to live there with Hilda—that, in a sense, he had got Moorend. By taking it out of the hands of the Pumphreys, Stuckey had restored the place to freedom of thought, at any rate.

Wedmore wondered what Stuckey would do with it. The contractor's impassive manner left room for unlimited speculation. Though Wedmore could hardly believe that Stuckey and Dr. Shipton had been in a conspiracy to defeat Sir John, Dr. Shipton's presence at the sale went queerly with the effect of solidarity about Moorend. There was something about the place which seemed to rally the most unlikely people.

A subsequent conversation with Polly Pumphrey deepened this impression and gave it a new turn. Catching Polly alone at Riverside, Wedmore said,

“Look here, Polly, what have you been up to?”

“Instead-of-whiching, as usual,” said Polly, with a wary glance under her dark brows.

“How’s the Filbert?”

“Sitting up and taking nourishment, I believe,” said Polly airily. “He’s got a new ’bus, and the rest is silence—I *don’t* think.”

By which Wedmore understood that Gilbert Stuckey was absorbed in a new motor-bicycle, and that it was a noisy one.

“What about Moorend?” he said.

“What about it?” said Polly defensively.

Her expression decided him to risk it, and he said, “As man to man, Polly, what made you tell Mr. Stuckey that your father wanted it?”

“Well, *you* didn’t want it, did you?” said Polly with a shameless grin.

“Get away, Polly,” said Wedmore, evading a direct answer; “you’re not going to tell me that you did it to please me.”

“Ah!” said Polly triumphantly, with pointing finger, “I said you didn’t, I said you didn’t!”

“How do you know I didn’t?”

“Because you looked like an angry bull,” said Polly succinctly.

“When?”

“Why, the first time you told them about it. Think I can’t read you, Jim?”

“Still, that wasn’t the reason——”

“No, Jim, it wasn’t,” said Polly with sudden gravity, “though you put the idea into my head. It was—I *hate* Carrie Archdale!”

At this Wedmore laughed outright. “Let me think it out,” he said. “‘Fire, fire, burn stick; stick, stick, beat dog; dog, dog, bite pig——’”

“Jim, you’re a beast!” said Polly, astonishingly

near to tears. "If *you* won't stiek up for Miss Woodruff when they're all doing the dirty on her——"

"Steady on, Polly," said Wedmore, surprised into gravity, "what's all this about?"

"Why, you know as well as I do why she wouldn't come here, and of course she wasn't going to have Hilda prancing round at Moorend, not if she could help it; and Carrie is a liar, because I asked Esmé Tudor, who was at Cleeve High School when Beatrice was, and she said she was a darling. *See!*" said Polly, all in one excited breath.

"So you did it for Miss Woodruff?" said Wedmore, thinking it best to stiek to that point.

"Yes," said Polly, "and a little for you."

"Don't see where I come in," he ventured, but Polly would not enlighten him.

"Anyhow," she went on, after a gloomy pause, "nobody seems to want Moorend now. I thought there would be an awful war after the sale. I was ready for that, but it frightened a year's growth out of me when the gov'nor took it so calmly. Most uncanny, I call it. Of course Hilda is different; everybody knows that Hilda doesn't know what she wants these days; and mother was always against it, though she didn't say anything. She, at any rate, will be glad when this angelic stunt is over."

Wedmore was unwilling to probe into the Pumphrey discussions indicated; and there were dark sayings in Polly's hysterical outburst which he thought it better not to explore; but he could not altogether stifle his curiosity about Polly's remarkable and, apparently, quixotic interest in Miss Woodruff, so he said,

“Do you know Miss Woodruff?”

“Not from Adam,” said Polly; and then, with a grin, “Except what you haven’t said about her.” After a moment she added coaxingly, “What’s she like, Jim?”

“She’s all right,” he admitted.

Polly nodded sympathetically, hanging out her tongue, as she would have said, for more. Recognising that there was no more to be had, she said,

“Not that I dislike Martin. He’s a perfect gent, and he’ll get over it all right. It’s Carrie who rubs everybody up the wrong way. Why don’t you make Hilda give her the push? Anybody can see that she’s only after your body. What is it they say? ‘Fishing in troubled waters.’ Well, sooner than let old Carrie get you, Jim, I’ll take you on myself.”

There Wedmore thought it best to leave it, with a caution to Polly not to let “the pictures” inflame her young imagination. After all, there was nothing in what she said which could not be explained as variations of the family joke.

## CHAPTER XXI

IF, after these confusing rather than illuminating conversations, Wedmore had needed any reassurance about Hilda's association with Woodruff, he would have found it by example in her father's attitude to "Saint Michael and All Angels." As the rehearsals went on, and the work was talked about more and more, and the probability increased that it would be hailed as an important contribution to British music, it was purged of all personality for Sir John. It was a natural product of Barstow, as if it had been rung from Saint Michael's tower itself, and, therefore, the plain duty of every loyal citizen to the disregard of all private interests. If Wedmore had cavilled at Hilda's connection with Woodruff through the work, Sir John would, no doubt, have referred him to the Committee.

As for Woodruff himself, if Sir John thought about him at all in connection with "Saint Michael and All Angels," it was only as the organiser might think about the object of a benefit performance: as a person to be kept quiet and out of the way until it was all over.

Woodruff was conducting the work, to be sure, but that only added anxiety to his irrelevance;

and when Hilda happened to mention that Woodruff had made some minor alterations in the arrangement of parts, her father exclaimed anxiously,

“ Oh, but I say, I suppose he has consulted Ingram ? We can't have the fellow tampering with the score.”

To say that Sir John Pumphrey had forgotten the Institute in “ Saint Michael and All Angels ” would be inaccurate ; the truth was, rather, that one was merged in the other as means to the prestige of Barstow. For it really was Barstow that Sir John had at heart. Wedmore had already observed, with amused respect, that, in spite of what his critics said about him, Sir John was entirely above any vulgar pride in his gift of the Institute to his native city. He had given it as he might have devoted capital to development in his own business.

Barstow, in fact, was his own business, and that not in any narrow sense as an opportunity for material profit ; hardly as an opportunity for personal prestige. He regarded it, rather, with the disinterested enthusiasm of the born company-promoter for a good thing. The flotation itself was his reward. His ideal for Barstow might be good or bad, but it was an ideal.

So far as Wedmore could make out from his detached observations upon his difficulties with slower-witted or smaller-minded colleagues, it was oddly like that of an Electorate in the eighteenth century. Industry, commerce and culture were all to be organised with a view to making Barstow shine in the world. All Sir John wanted personally was a free hand. He wanted, in a word, to impose his own “ kultur ” upon Barstow.

The weakness, as Wedmore saw, was in relation to the time of day, and it became all the more evident as, with undistracted attention to his own affairs, he was learning the importance of doing things his own way. He could see that Sir John's opponents were often swayed by narrow and selfish interests, but he could understand what was at the back of their minds. They were like small investors, wary of entrusting their savings to the company promoter. He might be making a mistake. It was a time of transition, in which it was perhaps better to mark time than to go ahead. The Institute itself was taking rather too much for granted as to the best means of reconstruction.

As Wedmore heard more and more of the ins and outs, both of local politics and of the larger questions which were being discussed, he often recalled Sir John's own definition of the purpose of the Institute. "What we want, and what we can do, is to make sure that our young men are properly prepared to take their part in those activities which, as business men, it is our privilege to direct and control." Supposing the business men were mistaken in their direction and control?

Whether or not Sir John had an idea that Wedmore knew something about his difference with Dr. Shipton, since the sale of Moorend his manner to him had changed. He was, in a sense, more confidential, and talked vaguely about the difficulties of getting anything done.

"If you bring it off," he said, "they are all over you; but if things go wrong they are at you like a pack of wolves. You know as well as I do that



it is not always convenient to show your hand until the thing has been carried through. There are people in Barstow who will tell you dark stories about the way one has conducted one's business. Well, I only ask to be judged by results, and I think I can say that Barstow is none the worse for my success."

The look which accompanied the remark was inquiring, but Wedmore could honestly say that he had never heard any dark stories. The perplexing thing, indeed, was that Dr. Shipton—if he were among the "people" intended—never mentioned Sir John Pumphrey. The avoidance of names on both sides, in view of what Miss Woodruff had said about Dr. Shipton's dislike of Sir John and Hilda's report of what Sir John had said about Dr. Shipton, was significant, but of what Wedmore could not imagine.

That it was something to Sir John's disadvantage seemed to be confirmed by his improved relations with Stuckey. The progress of the Institute necessitated occasional meetings between Sir John, Stuckey and Wedmore, in which Sir John was distinctly conciliatory to Stuckey, and Stuckey preserved his masterly impassivity. Watching the two men, Wedmore was irresistibly reminded of the situations in "Uncle Remus." But, though Stuckey never spoke of Sir John to Wedmore except in the way of business, Sir John now never lost an opportunity to praise Stuckey. He was an old scoundrel, of course, and as mean as they made them, but he did his work remarkably well, and Wedmore would be well advised to keep on good terms with him.

Altogether, Sir John was rather inclined to be apologetic to Wedmore these days. The impression Wedmore got was that Sir John was hoping he did not feel neglected; and it was not unlikely that something was due to family pressure. Lady Pumphrey said nothing to Wedmore, but Polly's remark that her mother would be glad when this angelic stunt was over had stuck in Wedmore's mind.

He thought Lady Pumphrey's anxiety on Hilda's account natural but unfounded. Women, and particularly women of her narrow interests, were unduly careful of appearances. He was inclined to think, even, that though Sir John never criticised his wife she might well have been rather a drag upon him in his larger activities. She did not, like Hilda, rise to the occasion. At any rate, though Wedmore had a great affection for Lady Pumphrey, he thought her husband's attitude to himself in the present situation far more flattering than hers.

"I don't worry about you, my dear fellow," said Sir John to him one day when Lady Pumphrey had been asking if the date for the opening of the Institute had been fixed, in view of the necessary preparations for Hilda's wedding; "you are one of us already, and you are launched. We can fix up your and Hilda's little affair in five minutes; but I don't want the girl to be bothered until after the Philharmonic concert. Now that we have taken this thing in hand we've got to make it a success. All you have to do is to carry on."

Family discussion was evident, but Wedmore interpreted Sir John's view as the right one. It was not that he had been superseded by Woodruff in

the Pumphrey esteem, but that both of them had been caught up together in pursuit of the Pumphrey ideal for Barstow. There were times, even, when Wedmore felt rather shabby for taking his liberty to "carry on," for minding his business in the more particular way which the enlargement rather than the diversion of his future father-in-law's patronage made possible. It was as if a clerk had turned to private calculations while the head of the firm was looking the other way; and Wedmore felt that he ought to have been standing about in case he were wanted to fetch and carry—whether for the Institute or for "Saint Michael and All Angels" did not seem to make much difference. They were equally for the glory of Barstow.

Even if Wedmore had not liked Woodruff, there would have been something infectious about Sir John's enthusiasm on his account. The way he handled the Symphony, from a publicity point of view, threw a vivid light on his own success in business. He beat up subscribers to the Philharmonic Society, offered a handsome prize to the Barstow School of Art for a design for a poster advertising the concert, got paragraphs into the London papers describing "Saint Michael and All Angels," and arranged an interview—not with Woodruff, but, by a stroke of genius, with Dr. Ingram.

If anything had been wanting to restore Wedmore's equanimity in a comparison between Woodruff and himself as objects of the Pumphrey patronage, it would have been the reflection that such enterprises would not have served any purpose of his. He cordially approved them for Woodruff, but that,

though he did not reason it out, was only to say that Woodruff could not stand on his own feet.

By comparison Wedmore felt extremely masculine, and all the more ready to disclaim any share of the artistic temperament; and it was this, as much as anything, which made him indifferent to the variations of the family joke which were evidently causing some anxiety to Lady Pumphrey. Woodruff was obviously a person who needed patronage and protection. With his softer art he was, so to speak, a woman's job. He must have, not merely the material help which Sir John was giving him, but sympathy.

Wedmore could not say that his own advances to Woodruff met with a very warm response. They met occasionally at Riverside, and Wedmore went out of his way to call on Woodruff at his rooms in Cleeve, but they did not get much forwarder; and, as compared with the promise of their first meeting, it made Wedmore feel that with Woodruff, as with his sister, he had been cut off in the middle of an interesting conversation.

In spite of what Hilda had said, Wedmore did not believe that Miss Woodruff, even if he had offended her in some way unknown to himself, was at the bottom of her brother's constraint with him. For one thing, it did not suggest a grievance, but rather some sort of obligation. If Woodruff had borrowed money of him, and had been unable to repay it, he might have shown a similar embarrassment.

Wedmore's greater age and experience, and his knowledge of the supposed peculiarities of the musical temperament, made him patient; and from time to

time he did succeed in getting behind Woodruff's reserve. Calling at his rooms one evening he found Woodruff in great depression; and, after some languid conversation, the young composer broke out into rather childish complaints about his circumstances. The Pumphreys were immensely kind, he said, and he was being given the chance of a lifetime; but, after all, what did it amount to? He could name half a dozen composers who might be called famous, who still had a difficulty in making a living. Not that he wanted money, and he was prepared to struggle, but it was hard luck that he should have to struggle alone. How, for example, could he marry?

For Wedmore, with his own marriage at hand, this was a difficult question to answer; but, with Miss Woodruff at the back of his mind as a not unpleasing companion in the struggle with poverty, he said something commonplace about compensations in the work itself. This, however, only seemed to irritate Woodruff.

"Oh, it's all very well for you, Wedmore," he said bitterly; "you are going to marry Miss Pumphrey." Then, flushing and stammering, he went on, "I don't mean that you gain anything by that, except—you know what I mean. One doesn't want to marry a rich woman. No, it isn't that. What I mean is that the sort of woman one would want to marry is always impossible to a poor man. That's the irony of it. Often enough it is the very woman who would be most willing to face poverty, but you simply can't ask her. The worst of it is that, in a profession like mine, and particularly if one has what

is called an artistic success, that is just the sort of woman one is most likely to meet."

The facts couldn't be denied, and Wedmore had to content himself with saying that, after all, one did meet the right sort of woman. This reduced the sensitive young man to abject humility, and he said, with tears in his dark eyes, which made him look extraordinarily like his sister,

"I say, Wedmore, you must think me an awful worm. The truth is, I suppose, that I am a bit overstrung. I shall be glad when this business is over, for better or worse, and I can get right away to London."

He did not add, "to my sister," but that was what Wedmore was thinking, with a queer sort of feeling which he described as curiosity. It was difficult to imagine what Miss Woodruff was like to live with, but Wedmore had a shrewd suspicion that, in addition to being overstrung, as he undoubtedly was, her brother was feeling the loss of her care. His room, though not uncomfortable, was in confusion, with clothes and music flung about anyhow. Certainly, and in material as well as moral respects, Woodruff was a woman's job.

After this outburst Woodruff closed up again, as if he had given too much of himself away. He had little formalities, such as taking off his hat when they met, which would have amused Wedmore if they had not vexed him by keeping him at a distance. There was something about Woodruff which forbade familiarity, a something feminine; and Wedmore found that the best way to make him talk was to avoid anything like personalities and get him on to some professional subject.

Thus, meeting him coming out of Saint Michael's after organ practice, he drew him into a discussion of the bells, which were then sounding. In pursuit of an idea of his own, Wedmore spoke of a famous Belgian carillon player who had lately performed at a church in the neighbourhood. Woodruff fell into the trap, and, with no sense of direction, walked with Wedmore towards his lodgings with quick steps, talking eagerly about the principles of bell music. He would have none of the carillon, which, he said, though capable of charming effects, ignored the real character of the bells—"as if you designed a building without regard to the bricks or stones of which it was to be made."

Change ringing, he went on to say, was the true bell music, because it was designed in their character, and brought out their qualities. His idea was that all music should be in forms determined by the nature of the actual sounds produced. The sounds were the material. He instanced plain-song which—did not Wedmore think?—bore a curious resemblance to mosaic; a mosaic of sound in patterns indicated by the diatonic intervals most convenient to the male voice. No doubt the square forms of the notes as written in early music helped to suggest the analogy, but he thought there was more in it than that.

This was getting a bit beyond Wedmore and, while assenting, he hauled Woodruff back to the bells. Woodruff explained that every bell gave out three notes—a fundamental note, or "tonic," the octave above, or "nominal," and the octave below, or "hum-note," besides harmonics, but that they

were seldom all three in perfect accord. (Here he stopped on the hill in the middle of the road, with uplifted hand, to call attention to the actual sounds in their ears, so that Wedmore had to pull him out of the way of a cursing taxi-driver.) Therefore, Woodruff went on, bells were tuned sometimes according to their fundamentals and sometimes according to their nominals; and, since one or the other would predominate according as the bells were rung fast or slow, it often happened that they sounded out of tune.

Wedmore found this exciting. It led him to the edge of something which, from the affinity between sound and feeling, and the way both played into expression in form in his own practice, had long baffled him. Not only that but, in a tantalising way, it seemed to hint a solution of the discrepancy between the basement and the top storey; the reason why, when he designed in the top storey, he had to leave his weight behind; the reason, too, why something of himself was left out of his love and at the mercy of a look, a voice—the Lord knew what. A dozen things were mixed up with it: what was the matter with the Pumphrey ideal for Barstow; why he couldn't explain to Hilda what he was aiming at in his work.

With the whirling harmonics of the bells about his head, and their pulsing boom in his heart, as he felt it, his mind went back to the warning of the hooter-buoy when he picked violets in the dusk, and he believed himself to be on the brink of discovery. Here, in this medley of sound, was the secret of Moorend; and here, at his elbow, was the interpreter.



With a quick search for the key question, he was about to ask Woodruff whether bells were ever tuned to their hum-notes, when he saw that they had come unaware to the iron gates leading up to his lodgings.

“I say, won't you come in?” he said, his hand on the heavy bars.

But at that Woodruff came to himself—or out of himself, for the same question occurred to Wedmore as when he himself had parted from Miss Woodruff—and said nervously,

“No, thanks; I can't come in”; but rather as if in obedience to a vow than from lack of time. “I must get on to my rooms,” he added lamely.

Wedmore did not press him, but he was acutely disappointed. Apparently, he thought, as he went up the slope, what he wanted from Woodruff must also be relegated to the basement of his mind; which, with his renewed preoccupation with the problems of his craft, was, incidentally, getting rather crowded.

On the other hand, Wedmore could have dispensed very well with the attentions of Dr. Shipton, who was his frequent visitor. The question of whether or not he liked Dr. Shipton was deferred by the suspicion that Dr. Shipton had his eye on the key of the basement. Wedmore felt on guard with him, as, apparently, Woodruff felt on guard with *him*. Not that Dr. Shipton asked many questions; and he pointedly refrained from any allusion to the sale of Moorend; but that he had a cool, amused way of taking things for granted which might well surprise the unwary answer,

One of the things he took for granted was Wedmore's interest in Miss Woodruff, and he brought him bulletins of her progress in London. She was, it appeared, fairly contented with her aunt—whom Dr. Shipton described as a sacramentalist, without her brother's red blood—in St. John's Wood, and she had already collected a considerable acquaintance of children, birds and animals in Regent's Park. Also she had, in the same place, her adventures with the predatory male; and it was upon these that Dr. Shipton was inclined to enlarge with what seemed like perverse approval.

“There is something wrong,” he said provocatively, “with the young woman who does not inspire dishonourable intentions.”

Wedmore, who had to go to London next day for a meeting of the Royal Institute of British Architects, evaded the challenge, less on general principles than because the idea that Miss Woodruff should be so exposed made him inconveniently angry; but Dr. Shipton went on, tilting back his chair and speaking with exasperating coolness as he refilled his pipe,

“It means that she doesn't come off as a woman. Anybody, so to speak, can be wanted on legitimate grounds. It is the difference between intrinsic and conventional value.”

“I should have said,” said Wedmore stiffly, “that the difference was only in the mind and the morals of the man who wanted her.”

“Don't be too sure about that, my young friend,” said Dr. Shipton, with a sudden change of tone and manner, looking at Wedmore, a disregarded lighted

match in his hand, with what seemed like professional concern; "or you may slip up very badly indeed. . . . I'm not preaching free-love, mind you, any more than Woodruff did; I'm only insisting upon what is necessary to make marriage a success. If you've read Woodruff intelligently, you must have observed that he was all for rendering unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's. He did it, too, as I daresay you've heard. Society needs regulations; that's allowed; but it's always a mistake to ignore the voice of Nature—or the voice of God, as Woodruff would have put it. (As I told you, we differed about—nomenclature.) . . .

"However," he went on more briskly as he struck another match, "there's no need for you to be alarmed; I guess Beatrice can take care of herself; and though, in my humble way, I try to emulate Woodruff's magnificent courage, I don't think I need tell you that I don't encourage her to tell me these things for an old man's cynical amusement. The point is that she has something very precious to take care of for the right man. In order to reassure you, I'll read you what she says."

He produced a letter from a large untidy pocket-book, and, after glancing over the first page with a reflective smile, read out,

" 'Yesterday another man spoke to me in the Park—a young one, this time, and rather a nice one. He looked like an official, a secretary, or something of that sort, and he wasn't prowling, but walking quite fast, with a little portfolio under his arm. He was much more scared than I was. I suppose I ought to have felt angry, but I didn't,

though I let him have it straight. He said that he had made a mistake. I said that he hadn't done anything of the sort, and that for two pins I would hand him over to the police. But I couldn't help feeling rather sorry for him, somehow. He looked so foolish—and I'm sure he wasn't really a fool. It's horrid having to tell a nice young man that he won't do, when he might have done if he'd given himself a proper chance! . . .

“There's a lot of philosophy in that last sentence,” said Dr. Shipton grimly, as he glanced over the top of the letter, “and when a young woman doesn't feel angry but lets him have it straight, I don't think we need worry about her capacity to take care of herself.”

Wedmore said he supposed not, but what really absorbed him was a sudden and imperative desire to have Miss Woodruff's address. There was no reason why he should not ask for it except the conviction—equally sudden—that Dr. Shipton wanted him to do so. Dr. Shipton wanted him to give himself away. That seemed to explain a lot of things. Perhaps it explained Woodruff's constraint with him; that Woodruff and Dr. Shipton had compared notes when he had written about his mother's proposal. He flushed hotly at the thought.

But the queer thing was that the moment he felt that his regard for Miss Woodruff was questioned by other people it became defensible to himself, as it had not been before. That, however, only made it all the more disturbing. Was it, after all, the voice of God? It was to check the confirming

rush of most honourable impulses that he said clumsily,

“No, I’m not worrying.”

Dr. Shipton laughed rather sarcastically and put up his letter.

## CHAPTER XXII

WEDMORE'S business in London threw him among old associates, with rather distracting consequences. This being his first return since his migration to Barstow, about two years before, he had to give an account of himself to hearers who might be called competent authorities, since they not only knew what was what in architecture but also knew him.

He stopped at his old rooms in Gray's Inn Place with a colleague named Cartwright, with whom he had shared them when he and Cartwright were draughtsmen together in the office of the titled Royal Academician who still employed Cartwright. In talking to Cartwright, a big saturnine, grizzled man, several years older than himself, who was supposed to supply the ballast to the more showy qualities of his chief, Wedmore found himself glossing over his connection with the Pumphreys. The sort of success which had come from the connection wouldn't cut much ice with professionals; and Wedmore could see that Cartwright, whose chief was one of the strings Sir John Pumphrey was pulling on Wedmore's behalf as a candidate for Associateship of the Royal Academy, was a bit anxious about him.

So he dwelt, rather, upon his more recent activities,

The housing shortage, difficulties with labour, and the high cost of building materials had put the younger architects on their mettle; and all sorts of experiments were being tried in which the more obviously ornamental aspect of architecture was disregarded on the principle of cutting the coat according to the cloth, with very encouraging results.

In this connection Wedmore talked a good deal about Stuckey, who had, indeed, just before he came up, consulted him as to the possibilities of a considerable housing scheme, on the lines of a garden suburb, on his new land at Moorend.

Cartwright strongly advised Wedmore to keep Stuckey up to the mark. A housing scheme, undertaken by a building contractor who had learnt to feed out of your hand, and would stand the racket, seemed to him an ideal opportunity. Wedmore had to admit that his only objection to it was sentimental; not on account of Moorend, for Stuckey was nearly certain to build there sooner or later, and the amenities of the place would be safer in Wedmore's hands than in anybody else's; but on account of the Pumphreys. Without going into details, he told Cartwright that Stuckey had bought the property against Sir John Pumphrey.

"So, you see," he added, "if I had any hand in it, it would be like adding insult to injury."

Cartwright, who had evidently some impression of Sir John Pumphrey from his chief, was highly amused; but he said,

"Well, Pumphrey hasn't bought you. He gave you your first chance with the Institute—that's

understood ; but he didn't even select your design himself, and you have done him proud. Everybody up here thinks a lot of your Institute ; the chief keeps a print of the perspective at the office to show clients what his pupils can do. If they make a splash with the opening in April, by the way, and your name is put up at the R.A. election which they always have before the summer show, it ought to get you some votes. You'll have the younger Associates, anyhow, and nothing influences the dug-outs like advertisement."

"No, Pumphrey hasn't bought me," said Wedmore, "but you must remember that I am engaged to his daughter."

The knowledge that he hadn't put all the cards on the table in speaking of Moorend, and Cartwright's allusion to the Academy election—as if by a natural sequence of ideas—made him say it rather irritably, and Cartwright glanced at him sideways.

"Yes, I suppose that is a complication," he said thoughtfully, and began to play with a pencil as if such matters were not for him.

His last word was unfortunate. It was exactly as a complication that Wedmore was trying not to think of Hilda ; he wanted to think of her as the shining way out of the complications of his own nature, with its unresolved elements. All the people whose judgment he respected seemed to be on the wrong side—the side associated with Moorend. There were no complications about Moorend—if you let yourself go. It was all too confoundedly in the line of least resistance.

Cartwright made him feel on the defensive about



Hilda ; and he spoke rather tartly about the inverted snobbishness which feared the complications of success. It was, he asserted, only a question of a little tact ; and he was not sure that the redundancy of successful people was not, in itself, as good a professional discipline as the poverty of materials they had just been talking about. Cartwright listened respectfully, but he did not pursue the subject, and Wedmore could see that his worst fears for him were confirmed.

The entrance of a visitor filled the gap in conversation between the two men, without, however, allaying the uncomfortable reflections aroused by the conversation in Wedmore's mind. The visitor was a journalist named Parsons, assistant editor of a weekly paper ; a shy, stooping, middle-aged man, with gentle brown eyes and a voice that was hardly audible. Hearing that Wedmore came from Barstow, he began to talk about " Saint Michael and All Angels."

Wedmore asked him if he knew Woodruff.

" No," he said, " but an aunt of his is a friend of my mother's, and Hobson, who does our musical criticism, was a student with him at the Royal Academy of Music. Hobson says that he is a genius, and that kept me from turning down a rather excessive paragraph which came in for our provincial notes. It was enough to make Woodruff's father turn in his grave."

Wedmore laughed, but reassured the gentle stranger about the merits of Woodruff's work, so far as he was able to judge, and from competent critics.

" Hobson will be interested to hear that," said

Parsons. "He felt sure that it must be all right, and I—though I am not a musician—found it hard to reconcile the name of Woodruff with anything cheap."

Sitting with his head on one side, the tips of his fingers joined, and a dreamy smile playing about his lips, he went on,

"The last time Miss Woodruff came to see my mother she brought her niece. Do you know her?"

Wedmore said that he had met Miss Woodruff once or twice—with a little shock of surprise, as he said it, at the slightness of an acquaintance which had so coloured his mind. It was like an infection.

Parsons did not speak for a moment or two, but remained sunk in a pleasant reverie. Then he said,

"She is one of the most lovely things I have ever seen. I don't mean so much in looks—though I suppose you would call her a pretty girl—as in her effect of poise. She is as passive as a flower, but with the same effect of intense energy, as if all natural forces came to rest in her by perfect balance. You could imagine her swayed by feeling, but she would be swayed altogether, like a flower in the wind, without betraying herself except by contrast with her surroundings."

Wedmore stared at him and then looked at Cartwright, expecting the latter to make some jesting remark; but Cartwright, leaning his big head on his hand, showed no surprise, as if this were the other man's habitual way of speaking.

"Of course," said Parsons, preparing to roll himself a cigarette, and speaking with a lack of

self-consciousness which proved that his poetical impression of Miss Woodruff was not inspired by love, "I have only seen her out of her context, so to speak, and perhaps the effect would not be so striking if one saw her where she really belongs—just as almond blossom in a London square is almost painfully beautiful." His eyes twinkled with quiet fun, as he ran his tongue along the edge of the cigarette paper, and he continued, "It was like coming upon a poem of Woodruff's in a parish magazine. Miss Woodruff—the aunt, I mean—like my mother, is what they call 'churchy,' a high Anglican, and all that sort of thing. That is the bond between Miss Woodruff and my mother. I don't mean that Miss Woodruff—the niece—is obviously out of sympathy with her aunt's religion, but that you don't notice it in her, any more than you notice anything else in particular. She has the same uniform texture as her father's work, and he, as you know, was implicitly religious."

Feeling that some answer was expected, Wedmore said that he had only read "Next to Nothing."

Parsons nodded approvingly, but said, "Yes, it is true, as somebody said, that Woodruff conceived his novels as poems, but the form does not allow the same concentration—or distillation. The novels are, necessarily, more explicit—and Woodruff could not always control his satirical bent. Some of his people must be called caricatures."

This brought Cartwright into the discussion. He preferred Woodruff's novels to his poems, but admitted that he was not a great reader of poetry. He liked things, as he said, in black and white.

Wedmore, who also was comparatively indifferent to poetry, was about to quote music, and "Saint Michael and All Angels" in particular, as an instance of what he supposed Parsons to mean by "distillation," but checked himself; and then recognised with some alarm that what had checked him was the fear that Parsons would drift from Miss Woodruff into a literary discussion.

"Yes, that's rather what I mean," said Parsons patiently, in response to Cartwright, "as somebody said, 'to name is to destroy,' and in black and white, as you say, you get all sorts of delightful things, but you lose a little of Woodruff. He is always most himself when he lurks implicitly; in the same way, I suppose, that Miss Woodruff would be less poignant—though certainly not less lovely—if you saw her at home in the country. Not that she struck me as unhappy in London, but it is evident that she has been rooted up. She is a little more aware of things than, I should say, was natural in her; interested and amused, like a child. One thing she said struck me as rather significant. It appears that her old home has been bought by a local jerry builder, and she said that she was glad; not defiantly, you know, but as one might welcome the death of a pet animal lest worse befall."

Wedmore wondered if Cartwright would identify Miss Woodruff's old home with the place they had been talking about before Parsons came in. Cartwright made no sign that he did, but, to turn the conversation from what he felt to be a dangerous corner, Wedmore asked Parsons what Miss Woodruff thought of her brother's great work.

“She did not speak of it,” said Parsons, “and, at the time, I had not heard about it, or I should have asked her some questions for Hobson’s benefit. Hobson is going down for the performance, he says. No, she talked mostly to my mother about the difference between London and the country. I hardly spoke to her ; it was such a pleasure to listen to her voice, and let her sketch herself in the air, so to speak. I have never felt so much temperament in a voice—or, rather, such a complete expression of temperament. One kept constantly coming back to the image of a flower—and this was the fragrance. I found myself shutting my eyes. Weren’t you very much attracted ? ”

“Yes, I thought her charming,” said Wedmore, to whom the question was addressed, using the trite word which did, however, describe the effect of Miss Woodruff upon him.

“Wedmore is not a fair subject,” said Cartwright. “He is otherwise engaged.”

Parsons nodded indifferently, and said, “That isn’t what I meant. One doesn’t fall in love with a flower—or if one does it’s all up with other engagements.” He laughed gently, screwing up his eyes. “That’s the penalty of the literary temperament—or the advantage?—that you don’t want to pick the flower so long as you can go on describing it or, rather, how it affects you. But you fellows are very patient. Aren’t you going to give us a drink, Cartwright ? ”

That night Wedmore wished devoutly that he had the literary temperament. He had never envied anybody anything so much as he envied Parsons his

power of transmitting Miss Woodruff without distortion. More than ever he was convinced that her disturbing effect upon him was due to some defect in himself. Listening to Parsons had been like looking in a mirror in which, for the first time, he could see the girl as she really was: unaffected by his own weakness, free from the emphasis put upon her by Dr. Shipton as the product of her father's philosophy, or by her brother as the difficult partner, or by Miss Archdale, through Hilda, as the embodiment of sex.

What was it Parsons had said? . . . Yes, that was it, he saw her implicitly. The result was an overwhelming desire to see her again in person; to give himself another chance—as one might wish for a second chance with a masterpiece, too hastily judged, in order to restore self-esteem.

He wished that he had got her address from Dr. Shipton; then he thought of telephoning for it to Parsons, whose address he could get from Cartwright in the morning without saying for what purpose; and he even dallied with the idea of walking in Regent's Park in the afternoon on the off-chance of meeting her. What he should say to her he did not know, except that some sort of explanation seemed imperative, if only to remove the misunderstanding, whatever it was, which caused her to be offended with him. He wanted no more than to have her know that he was glad of her existence.

Morning brought wiser counsels. Not because he was afraid of his own weakness now, but because of the deadly comparison that he was, and had been

all along, keeping at bay. Her image, as mirrored in Parson's description, was as clear as overnight, but the background was clouded with the complications which had silenced Cartwright.

## CHAPTER XXIII

WEDMORE returned to Barstow and Hilda in a glow of conscious virtue. But when he saw Hilda alone in the cosy hour between tea and dinner, he was struck by something strange in her manner, though her greeting was gay enough. Cutting short his manifestations of loyalty, which were made warmer by what he now recognised to have been a temptation resisted, she asked him eagerly about his doings in London. He gave her a detailed account of the meeting, saying who was there, and what they had said to him ; but Hilda said, coming to sit beside him on the couch,

“I don’t want to hear about your stupid old meeting ; what else did you do ? ”

The general tone of his encounters being, so to speak, anti-Pumphrey, and with Cartwright fresh in his mind, this was a difficult question to answer freely ; and Wedmore was conscious of sketchiness in his report.

“You don’t give much away, my friend,” said Hilda sorely.

Shop, he said, was not very interesting to repeat ; and he was about to kiss her ; but Hilda, who, as a rule, was anything but coquettish, held him off.



He did not persist, but he had the exasperated feeling that Hilda had only come close to him because she was emotionally far away. This division between mind and body contrasted disagreeably with what Parsons had said about being swayed altogether; and, with an unfortunate coincidence, Hilda went on,

“Did you see anything of Miss Woodruff?” giving his arms a little shake to cover what he felt to be a forced brightness of manner.

“No,” he said, trying not to make it sound emphatic.

“Why not?” said Hilda easily, though her nostrils dilated.

“For one thing, I hadn’t her address,” he said; unwisely adding, “But why should I go to see Miss Woodruff?”

“Martin says you made a very deep impression on her.”

The surprising information made him ignore the familiarity of the allusion to Woodruff; and he said with unaffected curiosity,

“I thought the theory was that I had offended her.”

Hilda smiled at him ambiguously, and said, “Come, now; you are not so simple as not to know that the two things are compatible.”

“I don’t understand Miss Woodruff,” he said dully, beginning to feel that his virtue—though partly a virtue of necessity—had been wasted.

“You give the impression, you know, of being afraid of her,” said Hilda, with hard eyes but smiling mouth.

The remark was near enough to the truth, though he did not believe that he had betrayed it, to make him colour; and Hilda, breathing quickly, watched him mercilessly.

"Why should I be afraid of her?" he asked.

"Ah, that is not for me to say," said Hilda, turning away her head.

Between this evasive treatment and his own consciousness of a reserve which he could not explain, he was beginning to feel, as Polly had said he looked, like an angry bull.

"Look here, Hilda," he said, taking her hands, "what's the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter with me," said Hilda, more hastily, he thought, than the question demanded, and looking round defensively.

"Then what is it?" he persisted.

"I don't know, Jim," said Hilda, disengaging her fingers.

The unwonted use of his name disarmed him. After all, Hilda had some cause to be troubled, though he did not believe that she knew it.

"Isn't it always a mistake, Hilda," he said gravely, sitting a little further away from her as he ventured nearer to the truth than he would have thought possible an hour ago, and supported by his virtue, "to go behind conduct?"

"Then you admit it?"

"Admit what?"

"That you *are* afraid of her."

"I don't analyse my feelings," he said, thinking that it was rather a case of being afraid of himself, "but I am quite sure that I have never said or done

anything to give Miss Woodruff or any other woman the power to frighten me."

"I didn't suppose you had," said Hilda, "but we can't help our feelings."

"I, at any rate, can help my actions," he said grimly, in the full consciousness of his wasted virtue, as he sat with folded hands; to which she replied, with a quick glance at him,

"Sometimes it might be better if you couldn't."

"Why?"

"If you were not quite so discreet in your actions and conversation, you might give more of yourself away."

That was an old grievance; and he tried, now, to explain the difficulty of discussing problems which were only half worked out; but Hilda said impatiently,

"I don't mean that; I mean more personal things. You give people wrong impressions . . . at least, I hope they are."

"Such as?" he said rather aggressively, thinking that she meant people like Miss Archdale.

"That you don't mind waiting for me," said Hilda faintly, and looking down into the fire.

"My dear girl!" he exclaimed, immensely relieved, as he thought, at the unexpected reply, "but you said it was necessary, that your father wouldn't agree——"

"Did you ask my father?"

"No," he admitted, beginning to see that he had credited her with more consistency and self-reliance than she had, "I took it for granted."

"Women," said Hilda, plucking at her skirt, "don't like being taken for granted."

“ Oh, if that’s all,” he said, putting his arm round her, though even then distracted between the appeal of proximity and the disorganisation of his plans, “ when can it be ? ”

This time Hilda did not resist, though she remained passive in his arm.

“ When ? ” he repeated, holding her closer.

“ You’re quite sure ? ” she murmured.

“ You must have thought me a brute ! ” he muttered remorsefully, his lips on hers.

Hilda responded, though rather absent-mindedly, and said, “ I must confess that I never quite liked the idea of being a sort of—a sort of circus.”

“ At the opening of the Institute, you mean ? ” he said, laughing with relief at the quaint comparison.

She nodded ; and then, with a quick hand on his arm, she said, “ Though, of course, I should be glad and proud in so far as the Institute is *your* success.”

“ Whenever it is, you are the coping-stone of my success,” he assured her ; and this time she returned the kiss in earnest.

“ Then shall I tackle your father at once ? ” he asked, when he was a little more composed.

Hilda thought that he might. “ And,” she said, “ I don’t think he will raise any serious objection now. You know what father is ; he gets an idea into his head, and wants it carried out to the foot of the letter ; and then he goes on to something else, and everybody is left in the lurch.”

“ Any time after Christmas, in fact ? ” said Wedmore, who had been rapidly reviewing his plans ;

“that is to say, after the Philharmonic concert”; adding, with a laugh, “If you ask me, that will be the time of times for your father!”

To his astonishment, for the first time in his experience of her, she began to cry; and, like all strong people, she cried with difficulty and ungracefully.

“You said you wanted me to!” she gasped.

“But of course!” he exclaimed, comforting her; “I wanted it more than anything.” Then, with Miss Archdale in his mind, he went on, “Have they been talking?”

“You never come to re—rehearsals,” sobbed Hilda, with an effort to recover herself.

He said quite sincerely that he had supposed he would only be in the way, adding, “Would you like me to come?”

“Of course I should!” said Hilda, turning wet eyes to him; “and so would Mr. Woodruff.”

His opinion was confirmed that “they” had been talking; and, though he felt that Woodruff hadn’t made it any easier for him to risk intrusion where outsiders might not be wanted, he said emphatically,

“Then I will make a point of coming”; adding, after a moment, “Is that all?”

“Yes,” said Hilda, and began to dry her eyes, the unfamiliar action, with a screwed-up handkerchief, making her look pathetically like a big child.

“You are quite sure you don’t mind my singing in the chorus?” she added.

“My dear child,” he said quietly, taking the suggestion of her looks, “you know very well, and”

—he chose the familiarity to emphasise it—“ Martin knows, that I am delighted that you should.”

“ Still,” said Hilda, after a pause which Wedmore had used to his own advantage, finding a new and unexpected attraction in her in this April mood, “ I can’t help thinking that it was rather a pity Miss Woodruff didn’t come to dinner when we asked her.”

“ So do I,” he cordially agreed ; “ but that can’t be helped now.”

“ Then you do think she stopped away on purpose ? ” said Hilda, with a slight return of her narrow looks.

“ Didn’t Woodruff say so ? ”

“ He didn’t actually say so, though he implied it,” said Hilda ; adding, “ Mr. Woodruff doesn’t understand his sister any more than we do. He says she has completely altered.” After a moment she went on, “ It always creates wrong impressions when people avoid each other.”

“ Well, we needn’t bother about Miss Woodruff now,” he asserted, with conviction at the time.

He couldn’t understand this morbid preoccupation with Miss Woodruff. Fantastic as it sounded, he would have said that Hilda seemed disappointed at rather than relieved by his assurances.

Hilda, however, said no more ; and Wedmore began to talk eagerly about the change of plan. So long as he knew, the sooner the better for him. As for the question of a home, there was a house on the Western Road that he would like her to look at. He hadn’t mentioned it yet to her father, because he was so busy. It would certainly cost less than

Moorend, and it had many practical advantages, besides that of being only about a mile from Riverside.

Hilda entered into these details with attention, though, as she said, she was quite content to leave everything to Wedmore's judgment. Before anybody else came in, and with Polly's as well as Miss Archdale's conversation in his mind, Wedmore thought it well to say a word about the influence of bosom friends.

"Indeed, you misjudge Carrie," said Hilda. "She is, I grant you, rather a highbrow, and she is always pulling souls up by the roots to see how they are growing; but she is absolutely loyal to us." Then, now quite recovered, she added, with a mischievous glance, "It is particularly ungenerous of you, because, for all you say, Carrie *has* a soft corner for you. If I were a jealous woman, it is Carrie I should be worrying about!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

SIR JOHN not only, as Hilda predicted, raised no serious objection to an earlier wedding, but seemed rather pleased than otherwise—as if an energetic subordinate had offered on his own initiative to undertake a neglected responsibility of his chief's.

“Certainly, certainly, my dear boy,” he said, with his hand on Wedmore's arm, as they stood in his private office, where Wedmore had asked for an interview. “Whenever you like.”

He spoke absent-mindedly, not as if the subject were unimportant, but as if Wedmore were already so much one of the family that he would understand its head's preoccupation with other affairs, and would act accordingly, with full discretion.

“As a matter of fact,” Sir John went on more briskly, as if, now that he had been reminded of the subject, it had developed since it was last mentioned, “my wife will be very glad. Women, you know, don't like long engagements.”

The last sentence was said in a confidential murmur, with a frown which seemed to suggest the memory of some family discussion in which, between themselves, the speaker had been obliged to stand up for his sex. At any rate it made Wedmore, with his



new light on Hilda's uncertain moods under her gallant exterior, feel something of a defaulter. But he knew very well that if he had pressed for an earlier marriage a month ago Sir John wouldn't have heard of it. If Wedmore had impressed the women as a laggard in love, it was Sir John who had let him down. It was another instance of the inconvenience of trusting to the business man's direction and control. This, and Sir John's effect now of "any old time," made him say rather brusquely,

"Well, when will it be convenient?"

"Let me see," said Sir John consideringly, and with a quick side-glance at him out of the whites of his prominent eyes, as he stood with his hands on his hips, as if he had been made to toe the line. "Philharmonic Concert on January the sixth—Twelfth Night—second week in January, I should say. Settle the date with my wife, and leave the rest to me."

His manner was that of a man who makes a note, "Wedding; see about it"; but Wedmore knew that, for all his brevity in prospect, he would see about it handsomely when the time came. Nevertheless, Wedmore could not get rid of a topsy-turvy feeling, as if he were asking his future father-in-law his intentions. Sir John's attitude, as he stood beside him—Sir John always flanked rather than faced a direct questioner—looking straight ahead, and blowing out his cheeks, was that of "Don't bully me." After a moment, he added, "How are things going on?"

Wedmore understood this to refer to his professional affairs, and he thought it a good opportunity to speak of Stuckey's suggestion about building at Moorend.

“Good, good,” chanted Sir John on a level note, as one encouraging an acrobat. “Keep in with Stuckey; keep in with Stuckey. He’s a cantankerous old scoundrel, but he knows what’s what.”

This was by no means the first time that Wedmore had observed that, since the sale of Moorend, Sir John’s opinion of Stuckey seemed to have improved. He had even remarked, at some derisive comment of Harry’s upon Polly’s plebeian taste, that Gilbert Stuckey was “a gentlemanlike young fellow.” Wedmore wondered now if Sir John were privately grateful to Stuckey for having saved him from what, on reflection, had been rather beyond his proposals as a wedding-gift. Following this train of thought, Wedmore spoke of the house on the Western Road.

Sir John, with alacrity at the more concrete subject, asked a few practical questions, and said,

“It sounds the very thing. Get my wife and Hilda to look at it with you, and if everything is satisfactory we’ll close. You can always build later. I want to get everything settled as soon as possible.”

So far as the speaker was concerned, Wedmore was not disconcerted at this cavalier treatment of matters of importance to himself. Unless he were very much mistaken, Sir John had been called to account by his womenkind for his earlier insistence on an April wedding. He was ready to agree to anything now, and his manner, when Wedmore left his office, was that of a person who had been, on the whole, let off lightly.

Two things puzzled Wedmore, however. One was that, when with compunction he went over his

conversation with Hilda, the point of her dissatisfaction still seemed to be that he hadn't seen Miss Woodruff in London. It was possible, of course, that she had wanted a particular instance in a matter which, whether on her own account or at the instigation of other people, had evidently been troubling her, and was disappointed at not finding one; but that seemed a little too subtle for a person of her directness. The other thing was that Lady Pumphrey, when she spoke to Wedmore about the change of plan, seemed as much surprised as relieved, and, above all, grateful. Her tone was not, as he had expected, one of mild reproach to himself, but one of apology for Hilda.

"I always said it was a mistake to wait so long," she said, "and not fair to either of you; but John would have his way. He thinks wholesale. Hilda is not as strong as she looks, and she has far too many irons in the fire. But it will be all right, I am sure, when she has settled down. Her house will take up all her attention. Between ourselves, I am glad that you are not going to live at Moorend. It is a beautiful place, of course, but it wouldn't suit everybody, and it struck me as relaxing. I shouldn't be surprised if it were haunted. Hilda needs a bright place. She is always happiest when she has plenty of things to do, and plenty of people to see. She is like her father in that, but he doesn't really understand her as I do. Hilda is much more romantic than anybody would think."

"Romantic" was not the word Wedmore would have used, but between the lines of the speech he could not help reading the hint that he, like her

father, had underrated Hilda's sensibilities. Miss Archdale, though portentous in her way of putting it, was evidently right about Hilda.

Lady Pumphrey, however, thought that the second week in January was too precipitate.

"That's just like John," she said; "he's all for a thing, and then, when he finds it won't do, he flies into a panic."

It would never do, she said, to look as if they were in a hurry. There would be a great many things to see about that only women could understand; and she was very insistent that Hilda ought to be taken "right away," to London or to Paris; and February would be quite early enough for that. All they had to think about was avoiding Lent.

When they had ascertained the date of Ash Wednesday, and fixed the wedding, provisionally, for the third week in February, Lady Pumphrey went on,

"I wonder what will happen to Moorend? Polly says that Mr. Stuekey hasn't managed to let it yet—or perhaps he doesn't mean to try. He has kept on the servant and her husband as caretakers."

Her vaguely anxious manner suggested that she would be glad to see Moorend as well as her daughter settled; and Wedmore, who was used to the wide range of her apprehensions, was not surprised at the apparent inconsequence. She did not mention the Woodruffs, but he could see them in her eyes; and if it had been possible for him to put into words what Moorend meant to him, he felt that he could have said them to Lady Pumphrey. She had the homely understanding which went further than intelligence. He knew that she liked Miss Woodruff,

and though she was evidently anxious about him on Hilda's account, she could appreciate his feelings by sympathy if not with approval.

He found himself wishing that he had Parsons to speak for him. Parsons had got nearer to the truth than anybody else. Unable to speak of what was incomprehensible to himself, he took her hand and said,

“Don't worry about Hilda, Lady Pumphrey; it is all right between us.”

Her dark eyes moistened, and she gave his hand a quick little shake. “I'm sure you're very good and patient, James,” she said, “but it will soon be over.”

Though there seemed to be conflicting elements in the Pumphrey anxiety, and though, whatever his private perplexities, he had done nothing to cause it, Wedmore admitted that, in the circumstances, it was not unjustified. One had to allow for family discussions of a person who was still an unknown quantity to them; and, if nothing else, Miss Archdale's moralisings upon human nature, and his own acquaintance with such people as Dr. Shipton, were enough to excite some perturbations. Therefore, it was with a good-humoured assumption of the rôle of the young man brought up to scratch that Wedmore lent himself to the subdued family rejoicing which followed the fixing of a definite date for the marriage.

If he had needed any hint of what the Pumphreys had been fearing, he would have found it in the behaviour of Harry the next time he dined at Riverside. Contrary to custom, Harry made a point

of shaking hands with him, and winked solemnly as he did so, with the sympathetic understanding of the errant male.

The only member of the family who did not seem quite satisfied with the new arrangement was Polly. If he could interpret the look down her nose which accompanied her "Cheerio, Jim," it conveyed a measure of disdain. Though, indeed, since she had made the suggestion about Gilbert Stuckey, it had been Polly's pleasure to affect an air of mystery with him, and he was still standing by.

Hilda now seemed happy enough, though rather high-pitched in her manner; and Wedmore could not help feeling that he was enjoying her increased demonstrativeness on false pretences. She overwhelmed him with a kindness which he had done nothing to deserve; and, on the other hand, he was not conscious of having done anything which would justify her in heaping coals of fire. They were both, he felt, playing to the gallery.

That he should think of these metaphors indicated the best way to accept the situation; and, apart from personal advantages, he looked forward eagerly to the time when he and Hilda should be left to themselves. Once out of the limelight as an engaged couple, they would find no difficulty in regaining their natural attitudes.

Therefore, it was with the sense of conceding to Hilda's relations rather than to her that Wedmore allowed himself to be led in garlands, so to speak, to rehearsals, where Woodruff, though still on the side of constraint in his manner, seemed glad to see him. The near approach of the performance would account

for some look of wear and tear in the young man, but he struck Wedmore as living on his nerves. His naturally hesitating manner was now sharp and abrupt—though that might have been the effect of his position as conductor, as after talking to a deaf person there is a disposition to shout at everybody. Woodruff's management of the choir, indeed, struck Wedmore with admiration. There could be no question of Woodruff's virility with the baton in his hand.

Looking at the house on the Western Road gave Hilda and Wedmore an excellent opportunity for making up to each other without the harrowing effect of a fresh start which their more public appearances compelled; and the company of Lady Pumphrey was a help rather than a hindrance by keeping them to the homely considerations which Hilda always needed a little encouragement to recognise.

That, indeed, when Wedmore came to think of it, was the only direction in which his domestic relations with the Pumphreys needed adjustment. Brought up in the country, in a social condition which did not need keeping up, he found the atmosphere of Riverside a little on the side of undue anxiety about the right thing; and, though on Hilda's part the anxiety was masked with humour, he could have wished that she had her mother's freedom from it. Though of humbler origin than her husband, Lady Pumphrey took her position more easily, and Wedmore always felt more truly at home with her than with any other member of the family.

The house, a modern one, in the neo-Georgian style, stood on high ground where the wooded cliff

which flanked the gorge on the south began to decline into the green flats bordering the river to its dock-beset mouth. Within easy walking distance of Riverside, it had been built for a Barstow magnate whose further prosperity had taken him into the county; and it was a little too simple to find a ready purchaser on the same line of progress, and a little too big for the mere suburbanite, so that it was going for less than its value.

Directly Wedmore had seen the house, with its conscious adaptation of old virtues to modern requirements, calculated proportions and intelligent exploitation of the ornamental resources of brick, he knew that it would do for Hilda; though he was not prepared to examine too closely the reason why.

They walked there on an afternoon of pale December sunlight which, burnishing the road before them, was, in itself, becoming to the house and to Hilda's charms. Full boughs would have made the house look trite, as a south-westerly mood in the day would have made her hard by contrast; but, among bare birches, the house bloomed up to its lines, and, in the crisp air, her contours and movements were heartening to the eye; so that, as he opened the gate for the ladies to pass, Wedmore said the right thing in the single word: "Brunhilda!"

Here, at any rate, there were no ghosts, but only the memories of success. Somebody had paused and passed on to further felicity. Innocent of birth and spared by death, though children had played and age had mellowed in its chambers, the house had human warmth, but all its history to come. As Lady Pumphrey said, when they stood on the



firm boards of the drawing-room on the first floor, looking west over the flats to the wooded ridge hiding the Channel, where a village nestled, the former tenants had "taken off the raw but left the freshness."

Standing off to take her in, as she shone in the level western gold from the tall uncurtained windows, Wedmore saw that Hilda was moved. The wave of tenderness which passed between them, thus parted, foreshadowed their relations. It was to be a happiness of mutual consideration, of giving and taking on a plane of conscious loyalty; not without passion, but with no mystery.

Then Wedmore knew why the house would do for Hilda. It would do for her because he brought to her, and could only bring to her, the love which did not pass understanding; and she, if he knew her, wanted nothing more, and had no more to give. As, in this thought, he smiled at her gravely, her lips trembled; and when Lady Pumphrey, with hollow footsteps, had left them alone, she came to him quickly and, holding him with all the force of her arms to her firm body, gasped out, with raining eyes,

"Indeed, indeed, I'll try!"

## CHAPTER XXV

IT was only when his conscious love and loyalty towards Hilda had been signed, sealed and dated, and given a future habitation, that the other woman slipped the latch of the basement, unguarded in these formalities, and came out with an effect of saying, "And what about me?"

Until now he had thought about her, when he allowed himself to think about her at all, as the intruder, the poacher upon debatable grounds which he didn't quite care to acknowledge as his own; grounds where there might be flowers but where there were certainly morasses. He had been there before, in his hot and deluded youth, in quest of flowers, maybe, but with only mud for his pains; and he was not to be beguiled now that he was acquainted with the delights of orderly gardens. She hadn't really come into the field of respectable tolerance, even supposing there had been no Hilda, much less into that of comparison with her.

But while she had been shut in the basement of his mind she seemed to have acquired virtue, if not rights. Not that she claimed any rights; she did not need to claim them; she was the woman in possession. Most significant of all, she had acquired

a name. Before, she had been only Anonyma ; not so much even " a woman " as " women " in the warning sense of the word ; now she was, very definitely, " Beatrice."

It was, he supposed, the old antithesis between sacred and profane love, brought to a crisis by his renewed allegiance to the former ; but the trouble was that, with repression, the profane variety seemed to have absorbed the bigger and, so far as he could judge, the better part of him. Behind her, as she appeared, pretty much as he had seen her for the first time, with one hand on the jamb of the doorway—though now holding in the other what was no longer a pink order to view but a sanguine draft upon his passion—herself perfectly passive, and with no curiosity in her grey eyes, there was a whole ragged regiment of unfulfilled hopes, baulked impulses and aspirations that he could not give a name to ; all the undisciplined reserves of himself that he habitually drew upon before reason took the task in hand.

Disbelieving her right to captain this troop by any claim to the capacities of an Egeria, he saw that circumstances had played him a trick by cutting off their acquaintance as soon as made. He knew enough about women and himself to doubt if, whatever the nature of her first appeal to him, it would have held through the wear and tear of acquaintance unless substantiated by qualities which she did not seem to possess.

If she had wanted to dominate his imagination, she could not have played her cards better than by keeping out of his way ; and he had lent himself to the purpose by banishing her from his conscious

thoughts until she had established a connection with his more instinctive powers which might be, in reality, not more valid than that between the figure-head of a ship and its motive machinery.

What, if he had yielded to it, even without any response from her, might have been a brief passion, had become an obsession of a particularly dangerous and stubborn kind. She was very far from being his ideal woman, as he would have conceived her, consciously; nor, on the other hand, as he saw her now, could she be dismissed as a mere bait for the flesh. If nothing else, the image transmitted and, so to speak, rectified by Parsons had prevented that.

The ideal woman must bear, at any rate in imagination, contact with the realities of life, and she did not; and the flesh craved something more substantial than a flower. Neither for soul nor body, as he understood the words, would she bear comparison with Hilda. She was, rather, the ideal of his nerves; of that state between sleeping and waking in which dreams are born, and old, and perhaps ancestral, memories come to the surface.

He could understand now why, when he had seen her at Moorend, he had thought of her as having lived there for many generations. In the chronology of his instinctive life she was the oldest thing in the world. So far she had not come into his actual dreams; but, having acquired virtue and a name, there would be no dream, sleeping or waking, that would be safe from her. When he had seen her at Moorend he had, though fearing it, supposed that her power would be limited to the place which, in its effortless fulfilment of all that he meant by good

building, would always remind him of her ; now he saw that her power was independent of time and place because it proceeded from her effortless fulfilment of what, not he, but his hidden self, hitherto duped or disregarded, meant by woman.

Facing her now, in her complete passivity which reminded him of Rodin's "Eternal Idol," he perceived how cunningly circumstances had confirmed the obsession. What he had read of her father's work, with its subversion of the ideals associated with Hilda ; her brother's music, with its implication of other ideals ; the sense of a freemasonry, disallowed, between Woodruff and himself ; what Miss Archdale had hinted about her, and the garrulous confidences of Dr. Shipton ; his own professional reserves from Hilda, for no reason but her inability to understand what he was after ; even his musings over the effect of a faith persisting, of a "somehow good," in Barstow : all these things had played up to her masterly inactivity by being packed away in the same basement in which he had secluded her.

Out of these unconsidered trifles she had woven her garment of justification ; she wore the livery, not of his animal desires, but of his finer qualities : æsthetic—and, for anything he knew, religious—sensibility, intellectual judgment, brotherly love, chivalrous indignation and wise discretion, as well as of his curiosity ; and if ever in the future he thought bitterly of might-have-beens, they would be referred to her. Untested herself, she would assume every merit in which, for the moment, Hilda might seem lacking.

So, for a day or two, he reasoned, trying to explain

her power by making her a bloodless fiction of his mind. But it would not do ; she was a woman, and her name was Beatrice. He had spoken to her, heard her voice and held her hand.

Once made free of his imagination under her own name, she rapidly took on the endearing accidents of humanity ; as when the word is made flesh, the conception embodied in the familiar material. Little tricks of manner, turns of speech and irrelevancies of appearance, hardly taken in at the time, came back to his memory like the events of yesterday on waking.

He remembered the peculiar texture of her skin, like the texture of the three-flowers, newly unsheathed, which divides them utterly from the homelier race of the garden ; the brown shade where her dusky hair curled up from her white nape ; the smooth turn of her small wrists as she handled the cups ; the subtle movements of her pink lips as she tasted her medlar jelly with slow enjoyment. He could see again her grey eyes as they narrowed and simmered with amusement when she said that he didn't seem to know much about housekeeping. Only now he recognised that the jest, though it implied no liking for him, was the approval of one who took no thought for the morrow.

Above all, there was her voice, cool, quiet and insinuating, with the quality of her frame in it, as the body of a violin gives its quality to the vibration of the strings. If he had never seen her, her voice would have evoked her authentic image—sketched her in the air, as Parsons had said. And when to "Beatrice" he added "Woodruff," the whole

fragrance of her personality was released like the quiver of two kissing notes in music.

It might be that she had gained a false advantage over him by chiming with unfulfilled hopes and unanswered questions, but it was in her own right as a girl that she had slipped into the space between mind and body, between thought and feeling, in which they arose. In her own right as a girl, and with no better knowledge or sympathy than any other, she was the nymph of the pool which fed his creative powers.

If he was to have any peace of mind in the bright home which he was to share with Hilda, the obsession must be at least contained. Even if he met Beatrice again he had no fears now as to his own conduct. Apart from the fact that she not only did not respond to him, but was entirely ignorant of how she affected him, she did not come into the range of material problems. She was as immune from wanton desires as her immortal namesake.

Nor did she really come into competition with Hilda. It was not a case of choosing between two women; it was a case, rather, of choosing between two sides of himself; and the choice had been made. What he had to do was to abide by it loyally; to see that he did not sin by omission. That was the risk—the risk of neglecting reality for a dream.

He did not even suppose that the case was uncommon; love, they said, meant the surrender of self. Formerly he had interpreted "self" as "selfishness"; now he perceived that it really did mean what it said. He was required to surrender something that he had grown up with, though he had

never before regarded it as anything but a source of trouble. Too late he discovered that it was the thing that mattered—as a man might discover that the task he had been shirking was the real duty.

For he was not deceived by the circumstance that he had met Beatrice only after he had given his love to Hilda. Beatrice was the older mistress ; he had known her by instinct ever since women had meant anything to him ; and, though he had only now recognised her, he had gone after her mistakenly more than once. Formerly, when he had blushed for these blunders he had blushed for them as sins against Hilda ; now he saw that they were sins against Beatrice. Hilda did not come into that category. She was the woman you gained by giving up, not by fulfilling yourself. She was the easy way out.

One thing struck him with singular force. When he had thought of his blunders in relation to Hilda, she had made them seem inexcusable ; but Beatrice redeemed them. She proved that, though none the less blunders, they had not been wanton.

The odd thing was that his recognition of Beatrice did not make him love Hilda less. On the contrary, so far as his conscious affection was concerned, it made him love her more, because his love was now mixed with remorseful tenderness as for the victim of his mistake. He felt as if he had used her as a short cut out of his difficulties with life. He suspected, too, that she had become aware of it. Her morbid preoccupation with Beatrice, which had perplexed him, was now explicable in feeling if not in reason. He had done nothing to give her cause for complaint, but she had felt something lacking



in him and, with surer wisdom, had recognised the symbol rather than the reason of what it was.

He could even understand her apparent disappointment that he had not seen Beatrice in London. She had no doubt of his loyalty, but, as she said, "we can't help our feelings"; and the particular instance would have given her an opportunity to interpret his feelings to himself.

He wished, now, that he had seen Beatrice in London, because it would have given Hilda such an opportunity. What had seemed virtue was now seen to be cowardice. He had run away from himself. If he had "given more of himself away," as Hilda said, she would have been able to deal, at least, with what he gave—as the wise physician will deal with symptoms when the cause is too obscure for direct treatment.

That she was prepared to leave the cause to time was proved by her anxiety to hasten their marriage. Recognising his inability to speak, she would take the deed for the word; and he now interpreted her "Indeed, indeed, I'll try!" as a promise to make the best of a love that she knew to be imperfect, not by positive disloyalty but by partial consent. He would be a miserable creature if he did not do all in his power to deserve the promise.

But, though his future concern must be for Hilda, his immediate concern was for the woman who not only did not care but did not even know that, in the name of himself, he was giving her up. Not less truly than if she had been his mistress in fact, he was breaking with a mistress; and some formal action seemed to be demanded.

He almost regretted the sense of humour which made impossible the simple expedient of writing to her; and a *Punch* joke, of the fuddled man who knocked up in the middle of the night the householder who had advertised for a man to go to China, in order to say, "I've called to tell you that I can't go," which he had often laughed at in memory, now struck him as perfectly reasonable. Nature in her had advertised for love, and if one must not love her one ought to tell her so. If he could not tell Beatrice that he was breaking with her, he could at least do something to prove that he was breaking with that part of himself which owed allegiance to her.

## CHAPTER XXVI

THE formal action presented itself finally as a visit to Moorend; and the moment it was presented he saw how right it was. Since, in collaboration with Stuckey, he would have to visit Moorend as Hilda's husband, it was imperative that he should say good-bye to Moorend as a lover.

The more he thought about it the more practical it seemed. Moorend was not only the shrine of Beatrice, but it was the concrete symbol of the personal ideals with which she had become associated.

His collaboration with Stuckey would be an opportunity to deny himself; to proclaim his allegiance to the more rational, though less inclusive, ideals associated with his future life with Hilda.

With whimsical humour, half melancholy but wholly tender, he let his constructive imagination play with the scheme; and he thought he could make it so that, while respecting all that Moorend was worth to the discriminating mind, it would sterilise the esoteric meaning of the place; a meaning which, he was prepared to admit, was partly due to the story of Beatrice's parents. For he could not deny that, since he had heard the story, her strange attraction owed something to the idea of her being,

by temperament and training, a love-child; that, as Parsons had said, "all natural forces came to rest in her by perfect balance."

To himself, at any rate, he could make the scheme a monument of renunciation and of resolution combined. He might even introduce features borrowed from the bright home of his future life with Hilda, thus correcting Moorend with the merits of its rival—for the two houses had become symbols of the two women. He was not so sure, now, that an architect could not embody woman in his work.

Perhaps in time, when he had become reconciled to the renunciation of one ideal in the pursuit of the other, he might even be able to tell Hilda what the scheme really expressed. That was an idea which she would be able to understand. He pictured them wandering there, with linked arms, on a summer afternoon, laughing together over his inability to be articulate, to confess, in anything but bricks and mortar. But, before he paid this practical tribute to the new love, he must break with the old; and it seemed to him not only permissible but advisable to accept, for the moment, the old at its full value.

He went out to Moorend as unobtrusively as if he had really been going to say good-bye to a mistress, taking the tram to the draggled outskirts of the city, and walking the rest of the way; though not so much with the idea of avoiding possible encounters with acquaintances in the train, as to emphasise the deliberateness of his going. Pilgrimages had to be made on foot.

A mild, drizzling afternoon, with the light rapidly waning, though breaking out occasionally into a

gleam of pale sunshine, as if to mark the decline of the day, was appropriate to his mood, besides bringing out the more intimate character of his surroundings, as more intimate personality is betrayed between smiles and tears. It was like walking back into his own past, into the twilight of impressions, "Fallings from us, vanishings," before memory began.

The disorderly suburb which had vexed him on his first visit now touched him as parallel to his own mistakes. Humanity blundered, but Nature, as exemplified by the thin song of a robin in a garden, was not driven out. Discussion with Stuckey had brought this part of the road into critical reflection, instead of leaving it hopeless, and he looked at it now with sympathetic though repairing eyes. He could at least check the process of degeneration, but it must be done not by sweeping reforms but by the patient grafting of the better on the worse until the point was reached where the "somehow good" could be consciously developed in orderly design.

When he came to the long wall which had given him positive pleasure, it was like the recovery of guidance after mistakes. The difference was that, in the interval, he had learnt to condone the mistakes.

In its effect of holding a secret, the Valley of Rocks had not lied, but he knew now what the secret was. It was the secret of his own nature—in a sense the secret of everybody. For everybody there was a hidden perfection, a point at which all natural forces came to rest by perfect balance; but it must be reached by everybody in his own way, without discarding any part of himself in the process.

That, in a word, was love. The intrinsic, the

demonstrable qualities of the object did not matter, and the conscious ideal of the mind was nothing to the instinctive ideal of the whole creature.

Again he leant on the parapet of the little bridge, and allowed his imagination, now informed, to follow the path under the bare beeches beside the water. Of course there were dragons, but the dragons were the invention of partial desire.

That brought back Dr. Shipton, and his abrupt behaviour; and then Wedmore knew that, without acknowledging it to himself, he had been seeking in Dr. Shipton's conversation some hint that Beatrice had been attracted by him. Whether or not Dr. Shipton was aware that he had, he would not give the hint. That would be making things too easy—at the expense of the girl he doted upon. The choice must be made in ignorance of the probabilities of success. The choice having been made and confirmed, there was nothing to do but make the formal act of renouncing the alternative.

That he was making it, however, gave Wedmore a certain licence; and he went over in his mind not only what Dr. Shipton had said, but what, according to Hilda, Woodruff had said. "A very deep impression" might mean anything; but it showed that she was, at least, not indifferent. Was it possible that she felt, and resented, her own attraction for him? If so, it could only be because she mistook the nature of the attraction—and in that case she must have taken her cue from him. He had certainly mistaken it, had referred it to an absurd weakness in himself, if not to his baser passions. That might well account for her being offended with him.

As he thought of this, and of the only evidence he had that she was offended, what her brother had said, Wedmore saw that the only unexpected thing which had come out of Moorend was Woodruff himself. All the rest had been a perfectly consistent development of his first thrill, in which body and soul were so strangely mingled, at the farm buildings away there on the hillside against the western sky on his left. What the farm buildings had promised had been fulfilled in Moorend, and the meaning of Moorend was Beatrice.

But Woodruff, identified now with "Saint Michael and All Angels," so soon to be performed, and, as Wedmore believed, to startle fame, was irrelevant. Beatrice had been a recognition; she had been foretold by many things in his life, not to speak of his gradual exaltation, as that of a child "getting warmer" in a game, that afternoon; but there was no precedent for Woodruff; and, now that he came to think of it, there could be no solution. Woodruff could not be included in his formal act of renunciation. Beatrice might be walled-up, imaginatively, at Moorend, embodied in the scheme that was to be a monument of renunciation and resolution combined; but Woodruff was out and very much about, and wherever he was there would be the shade of his sister. He would be like the living relative of a woman actually buried, with all sorts of inconvenient questions implied if not asked.

As if in fear that he might ask such questions, Wedmore wondered what Woodruff would do after the concert. Would he go to London, to his sister, and further fame, or would he, under Pumphrey

encouragement, settle down to the pursuit of fame in Barstow? Wedmore perceived that if Beatrice was the meaning of Moorend, as it concerned himself, her brother was its problem as it affected his relations with other people.

Unwilling to weaken the effect of what he was doing, now, by anticipating the difficulties of the future, Wedmore resumed his way and followed the path by the water over wet brown beech leaves until he came in sight of Moorend. Seen with regret instead of promise in the misty light, itself regretful, of a December afternoon, the house lost nothing of perfection; and in giving himself up to its architectural beauty Wedmore, for the first time, gave himself up to the full beauty of its human associations for him. Hilda could afford to wait while he paid his devotions for the first and last time.

He looked at the house frankly in the spirit of a lover dwelling upon what he had lost. He imagined himself coming home, not only in the sense of coming to the concrete symbol of what he meant by good building, but coming home in reality to what, not he consciously, but his wiser instincts, meant by the one woman. He perceived, then, that, distrusting his instincts, and with the idea of self-protection, he had done Beatrice an injustice as a woman by thinking of her as the spirit of Moorend. If he had met her anywhere else, as Parsons had met her, she would have had the same effect upon him: an effect which he now recognised to be the quite homely one of love at first sight.

All his turnings and twistings, his attempts to explain her power as an occult relationship to the



house which had moved him, were merely efforts to escape from what must be a common experience. That they had been caused by loyalty to another woman did not make them any the less foolish in themselves, or less unjust to the woman who inspired them. Not that he ought necessarily to have yielded to love at first sight and straightway asked for his liberty from Hilda. Loyalty might make it necessary to run away from love, but that was no reason why love should be misrepresented.

So, for the moment, he admitted the full human value of might-have-beens, confident of his power to renounce them. The light which presently appeared in the lower window to the left of the tower, reminding him of the caretakers, completed the illusion of coming home. With no feeling of disloyalty but, rather, with the idea of safety, he went over the details of his first visit, trying to find in them some evidence that Beatrice was not indifferent to him. Safety demanded at least the assumption that he might have had a chance with her. You could not give up what you had never been within possibility of having.

The result of his recollections was only to confirm her extraordinary effect of passivity which Parsons had noted. Her mild surprise when he had told her that he was not married already, which might have been taken to prove indifference, only showed her freedom from the unconsciously interested speculations of the average girl: that she did not think of every man in relation to herself. Taken with her admission that she thought she should like him to buy Moorend, it was not enough to flatter, but it

showed that she was not indifferent to him as a human being; and, as he discovered with a little shock of surprise, it was as a human being rather than as a man that he now wanted to be assured of her regard.

In his efforts to escape from her power he had tried to identify her with his baser passions; her gentle revenge had been to identify herself with his better nature so securely that he no longer thought of her as an object of desire. Or, rather, desire was now resolved, like a discord in music, in a passion which expressed the whole of his nature.

As one having the right of his passion, and careless of observation, Wedmore crossed the lawn in the dusk and made a circuit of the house at close quarters, dwelling upon its details with a loving eye. The next time he came there he would be studying it objectively, considering how it could be reconciled with more trivial surroundings. That the contact would be comparatively remote did not affect his intention; one had to consider the carrying capacity of the eye in passing from old to new. Hearing voices within, as he passed the kitchen quarters, he was half minded to renew his acquaintance with Mrs. Dando, but then decided that he was not in the mood for conversation.

## CHAPTER XXVII

THE concerts of the Barstow Philharmonic Society were given in the Albert Rooms, which, dated by their name, faced the ascent from Barstow into Cleeve at right angles to the Institute. Like many other buildings of their period, the rooms—and particularly the concert hall—were better adapted to their purpose than their classical pretensions allowed them to look; but when Wedmore took his seat between Sir John and Lady Pumphrey, Sir John was emphatic about the necessity for more worthy provision for the art of music in Barstow.

The larger City Hall, down by the harbour, was all very well for the Festival; but its use for miscellaneous purposes, including political meetings, made it unsuitable, as Sir John said, for concerts of a more intimate kind. What they wanted, and what they must have, was a hall built for music alone.

It was easy to see that Sir John's imagination was looking ahead. He asked Wedmore questions about possible sites and probable costs, and made intelligent remarks about the management of acoustical properties. Evidently he had been reading up the subject. Wedmore was interested and amused, and did his best to rise to the occasion without

seeming unduly eager to spend Sir John's money on a concert hall, but he observed that Sir John listened to him rather absent-mindedly, glancing round at the rapidly filling seats. The concerts of the Society were always well attended, but to-night seemed likely to be a record.

The point of Sir John's anxiety was betrayed when he broke off in the middle of a sentence to say fretfully,

"I hope this fellow won't let us down."

"This fellow," as Wedmore understood, meant Woodruff. Sir John went on to say that, for his part, he thought it was a pity that Dr. Ingram was not conducting "Saint Michael and All Angels." He was an old stick-in-the-mud, of course, but there was nothing like experience. These young men were so apt to let their feelings run away with them.

Hilda, he admitted, was quite sure that Woodruff was competent; but, between themselves, women were inclined to be swayed by irrelevant considerations. If a fellow looked interesting they assumed that he was a genius. Himself, he should feel happier when the confounded thing was over. He had done his best to make it a success; everything that advertising could do had been done, and three London papers had sent down their critics. If Woodruff made a mess of it he couldn't say that he hadn't been given a chance.

The point of view amused Wedmore, and intensified his natural sympathy for Woodruff. Evidently, for Sir John, Woodruff had taken the place of "author" written small on the bills. The whole thing resolved itself into a Barstow effort under Pumphrey patronage.

If it came off, Sir John would follow it up with enthusiasm, and would probably build his concert hall, but if it failed he would cut his losses in reputation—he would no more grudge what money he had spent than he would grudge a flutter on the Stock Exchange—and, as likely as not, put the blame on Hilda. Woodruff would gain or lose strictly by results.

Wedmore himself had no fear either that Woodruff would make a mess of it or that his work would fail to gain at least respectful attention, but he was impressed with the precariousness of Pumphrey patronage. What Woodruff was in himself did not seem to count at all, at any rate to Sir John. Wedmore was more than ever convinced that he had done wisely to disregard the Pumphrey idea of success.

Incidentally, he read between the lines a good deal of family discussion. Sir John had been rather cross because Woodruff would not dine at Riverside before the concert to be “bucked up”; but Hilda and Lady Pumphrey had approved his absence. Evidently, Sir John’s apprehensions about Woodruff as an instrument of the Pumphrey prestige were complicated by some feminine concern for him as a human being.

Lady Pumphrey, on Wedmore’s right, was now chiefly anxious about Hilda. It was rather a pity, she said, that Hilda was taking such a prominent part, and she hoped she wouldn’t break down publicly. Wedmore reassured her, and then she said nervously, “Well, you’re very good, that’s all I can say.”

Another thing that worried Lady Pumphrey was

that Miss Woodruff should not have come down from London to hear her brother's work performed. "It looks so pointed," she said, though of what she didn't explain. As time went on she kept looking anxiously round, in the hope that Miss Woodruff might yet appear, and Polly, instigated by her mother, did the same.

Polly struck Wedmore as looking depressed. She sat, biting her cheek, with the expression of one who wanted to wash her hands of the whole affair.

Altogether, Wedmore received the impression of a good many cross-currents in the Pumphrey attitude to an occasion which, for him, was considered only in the hope that Woodruff would have a success: an impression which was presently intensified by the tuning up of the orchestra, with agitated question and answer and little derisive comments on the wood-wind.

The only member of the family who did not seem preoccupied with questions which did not arise out of the occasion was Harry, who sat with his hands in his pockets and his legs outstretched in an attitude of slightly humorous detachment.

For the first part of the programme Woodruff did not appear, a Bach Cantata, the special effort of the choir, being followed by works of Haydn and Mozart, to show off the orchestra, and miscellaneous pieces by native composers, to demonstrate that Barstow knew the time of day. The works were well performed and warmly received, Dr. Ingram being both able and popular, but expectation was clearly absorbed in "Saint Michael and All Angels"; and when Dr. Ingram appeared leading Woodruff by the

hand to take his place at the conductor's desk there was a most encouraging noise.

Woodruff, though evidently excited, inspired confidence by his complete absorption in the task in hand. He did not hurry over his preparations, but looked over the score, and made some slight alterations in the positions of his instrumentalists.

So far as Wedmore could judge, Hilda, who, in white with the blue sash which distinguished the sopranos, looked triumphantly young in the somewhat mature ranks of the choir, had no anxiety on Woodruff's account, and certainly none on her own. Her "prominent part," which Lady Pumphrey deprecated, was, in reality, not more than that of leading the sopranos and taking a short recitative; and Wedmore had no fears for her.

Just before Woodruff raised his baton, however, her eyes, wandering easily over the audience, came to rest on some person in the back seats; and she coloured up, if Wedmore were not mistaken, with pleasure. He looked round quickly, but could see nobody whom he recognised; and when he looked up at Hilda again she was pale, he supposed, with the excitement of the critical moment.

With all his instinctive belief in the merits of "Saint Michael and All Angels," fortified by Hilda's judgment, Dr. Ingram's acceptance, and the enthusiastic opinions of this person and that while the work was in rehearsal, Wedmore was not prepared for the effect of its actual performance. This was the first time he had heard it as a whole, with more than a skeleton orchestra; and, when Woodruff had gone through it on the piano, Wedmore had

been, naturally, attentive to the "programme" character of the work—as one may be distracted by the subject of a picture from its quality as a work of art. Now he forgot everything but the music itself.

From the opening statement of the familiar "quarters," he was struck by the way Woodruff seemed to be improvising upon the orchestra. How much of this was due to the composition, and how much to the conducting, he could not tell; but the effect seemed to him to be more purely musical than that of the classics he had been hearing. The choir and the orchestra seemed to feel it, too. They had been obedient to Ingram, but to Woodruff they were responsive. Something must be allowed for the smaller choir, for thirty or so voices instead of a hundred; but the difference in intimacy was remarkable.

Presently, too, as the familiar atmosphere of the city was felt, if not recognised, by the audience, Wedmore was struck by something else. The piece was not being performed before an audience, but with an audience. They were part of the composition, and they, not less than the choir and orchestra, responded to the quiet movements of the slender dark figure at the conductor's desk.

Whether there were any tricks in it, like the hypnotising patter of jugglers, Wedmore could not say; all he knew was that he had lost his identity and become one of a crowd swayed together. He shared the lives of his fellow-creatures as he had never shared them before, and all his difficulties in intercourse were smoothed away. The music made



articulate what he meant in his work, and resolved the conflicting elements in his nature. It explained the inexplicable, and for the first time he felt that he could have told Hilda what Beatrice meant to him, with no loss to her, and that she would have understood. But, surely, with that music on her lips and in her ears she must understand ! For the moment everybody understood everybody.

When the first movement ended with the twelve strokes of midnight, there was, for a moment, silence ; and one might have supposed an ideal audience which did not applaud before the end of a piece. It was only for a moment, however, and then, as the audience came to, after a pause which might have been allowed for in the rhythm of the music itself, there was a crash of applause. It continued until Woodruff was forced to turn round and bow. Wedmore observed that the two men to the left of Sir John, whom he supposed to be musical critics, were talking gravely together, like people who, coming in the course of business, find themselves faced with an unexpectedly serious responsibility.

Once having got his audience, Woodruff did not let them go. The music might be over their heads, but it reached their hearts ; and Wedmore could not get rid of the feeling that Woodruff was conducting a general confession in which the choir and orchestra were merely setting the pace. Whatever the critics might have to say, and whether or not the piece would bear re-hearing, there was no mistaking the kind of success it was having now. It was a popular success in which local pride was long ago forgotten and the question of absolute merit became almost

irrelevant. After each movement there was immediate clapping and stamping, and when the piece came to an end the jubilant peal was followed by what sounded like a savage roar for the composer.

Woodruff was called and recalled a dozen times. Now, and only now, acutely nervous, he stood, a dark slender figure, grimacing between smiles and tears, and bowing in little jerks, evidently not quite sure yet whether his reception was friendly or hostile. It seemed as incredible that this mannikin could have created the work which had swayed the audience as that he could have produced the actual volume of sound.

Sir John Pumphrey, who had been clapping mechanically, with exclamations of "That's all right!" and "Good man! Good man!" now buttonholed the critic on his left with hasty questions. Wedmore did not hear what he said, but the astonished "I should just about think so!" from the other, as he struggled into his coat, said all that was necessary about critical opinion. Sir John was clearly a little nonplussed at the success of the evening and, for a moment, uncertain how to handle it. "Let me see——" he began, in the tone of one who thinks out the next move; and then, as his eyes fell on Mr. Folkestone making for the door under the platform on the left, he exclaimed, "Of course!—Come along, Jim, come along, Annie—Polly—Harry—all of you!"

When they reached the crowded, smoky artists' room, they found Woodruff the centre of a knot of people all trying to shake hands with him at once. He kept murmuring, "Thank you . . . thank

you . . .” nervously, in his quick staccato, but it was quite clear that he did not distinguish one person from the other who congratulated him. But, just as the Pumphrey party approached, he caught sight of Hilda, who had entered by the other door. He darted forward impulsively, took both her hands and raised them to his lips.

The action was so spontaneous, and so completely in accord with the general feeling, that Wedmore could have laughed out with pleasure; as, indeed, Dr. Ingram cried, “Bravo!” But Hilda snatched her hands away almost rudely, flushed up, laughed awkwardly, and glanced across at Wedmore. His expression must have reproved her, for she turned to Woodruff again, and said, “Indeed, I’m delighted at your success!”

But Wedmore was oddly disappointed and annoyed. It seemed to him that Hilda had failed at a crisis, a human crisis, and had behaved with vulgar propriety. He could see that poor Woodruff was crestfallen at the effect of an action which had been as uncalculated as that of an affectionate child—which, indeed, at the moment he was. Hilda was the recognisable figure among those who had helped him to success, so what more natural or graceful than that he should kiss her hands?

## CHAPTER XXVIII

IN the week following the concert Wedmore received at his office a letter from the Dowager Countess Kelmscot. She was, she explained, considering some alterations to her house at Stoke in the interests of her younger son, Mr. Lovel, who was about to be married ; and Mr. Wedmore had been recommended to her agent by Mr. Stuckey as an architect who would be able to do what was necessary with due regard to the existing merits, such as they were, of Stoke House. If Mr. Wedmore could make it convenient, Lady Kelmscot would be glad to see him at Stoke on the following Wednesday afternoon, to discuss the proposed alterations.

When Wedmore mentioned this engagement to Hilda, he was a little surprised at the eagerness with which she exclaimed,

“ You’ll go, won’t you ? ”

“ Of course I shall,” he said. “ It is only a case of alterations, but Stoke House is an important place of its kind. The job should be interesting as well as profitable. I wish you could have come with me. It is rather a tiresome cross-country journey to Stoke by rail, but if you had been coming we could have borrowed the car.”

"Oh no, that would never do," said Hilda, with a nervous laugh; "and I don't think you had better borrow the car for yourself, not this time. . . . If you don't mind," she added, after a pause, "I shouldn't suggest it to father."

"Shouldn't think of it, without you," he said, wondering at her insistence upon the point.

"All the same," said Hilda, who had been thinking deeply, "I am extremely glad that Lady Kelmscot has asked you to Stoke. I wonder . . . It might lead to all sorts of things."

Wedmore did not think it wise to reckon on too much. The Kelmscots, he reminded her, were not very wealthy; and, speaking generally, it was the new rather than the old people who had money to spend on building nowadays. Hilda admitted all this, but insisted upon the importance of the connection in a way that amused him. She had not her father's respect for titles; indeed, she was rather inclined to affect the modern way of jesting at them; but for some reason or other she seemed to think that Lady Kelmscot might be of great use to Wedmore. She reminded him that Mr. Woodruff had spoken of her kindness.

Altogether, Hilda was rather puzzling, these days: unusually energetic, and persistently cheerful, with snatches of song constantly on her lips. Wedmore ought to have been delighted at this anticipatory joy in their marriage, but Hilda struck him somehow as singing to keep up her courage, and he would have felt more comfortable at a lower pitch. He would have been glad, too, if Miss Archdale had been less in evidence in the wedding preparations which were

now being discussed. Since his conversation with her on the evening after the sale of Moorend, he had privately nicknamed her "Cassandra," and, though she had not spoken in that strain again, her portentous manner now justified the title. Apparently she had forgotten her counsel that he should not let Hilda feel a blank, for she seemed to anticipate her function as prospective bridesmaid by guarding Hilda from his approaches. With some concession in his own mind to the justice in spirit if not in fact of Miss Archdale's concern for him on account of Delilahs, he could excuse that, though he found it tiresome; but he could feel Miss Archdale edging not only between him and Hilda, but between Hilda and her mother. Or, rather, her constant presence at Riverside had that effect, without any effort of her own; because Lady Pumphrey, though she never said so, did not really like Miss Archdale.

Wedmore felt that this was a time when the relations between Hilda and her mother should have been closest, particularly because he could see that Lady Pumphrey was still rather anxious about Hilda.

The London papers had confirmed the success of "Saint Michael and All Angels" to the extent of regarding it as an important contribution to modern British music; a subject which was being energetically impressed upon the public, so that Woodruff's name and portrait began to appear outside the musical columns, with personal gossip connecting him with his father. There were even references to Moorend, which was described as the Woodruffs' ancestral estate. One critic complained of a certain provinciality of spirit in "Saint Michael and All Angels,"

and another of the lack of a definite use of folk-material; but, allowing for the personal hobbies of the writers, there could be no question that Woodruff was being taken very seriously as a composer.

Wedmore had not seen him since the concert, but he gathered from what was said at Riverside that Woodruff, though accepting his success with becoming modesty, was rather depressed. Some reaction was only to be expected, and he had also to decide upon his future movements. He thought he ought to go to London, but Sir John Pumphrey was extremely anxious that he should stop in Barstow. There had been hints that Dr. Ingram was thinking about giving up his post as Cathedral organist, and Sir John was eager to be pulling strings on Woodruff's behalf.

Stoke House, which Wedmore reached in the early afternoon after a thirty-mile journey, with a wait at the junction, was a Palladian mansion standing rather nakedly upon an eminence in an extensive park. The best that could be said for it was that it was consistent; and, as he approached the house by a winding drive, punctuated with pines, the remains of what had once been an avenue, Wedmore saw that the interest of the job, whatever it was, would be to preserve this consistency. Never having dealt with a house in a similar style and period, he took his time over the ascent so that he might absorb its character. It affected him like a person of studied manners, who must be allowed to finish sentences even when their import was clearly grasped; and he wondered if Lady Kelmscot would need the same consideration.

Lady Kelmescot received him in a small parlour, evidently used as an office or study. She was a short, large-headed woman, looking considerably younger than what he supposed to be her years, with angry blue eyes, a grimly-humorous mouth, and abrupt manners. "On the look-out for having her leg pulled," was Wedmore's irreverent comment as he sat down, relieved that his anticipations of a long-winded person had been incorrect. He did not suppose that Lady Kelmescot had heard much about him, but there was in her greeting an odd effect of impatient familiarity, as if, as he phrased it, she knew the sort of fool one was. This put him at once at home with her, and he was prepared to meet arrogance with impudence.

She got to business with encouraging directness.

"Well, Mr. Wedmore, you've seen the sort of house it is—ugly, I call it, but decent, and very comfortable; and as I have lived here most of my life I ought to know. I don't know what your views are, but my agent, Mr. Andrews, tells me that you have a head on your shoulders and are not above considering practical questions. One can't live for ever, and these young people are bound to pull the place to pieces, sooner or later. They want room for the monkey-performances they call dancing, bathrooms, billiard-rooms, lifts, electric light, central heating and Heaven knows what. Better do it now, I say, than leave it to them. Don't make more mess than you can help, because I have to live here while it is being done. This beautiful Government has left me no money to go anywhere else."

The alterations, as Wedmore quickly saw, when



they had been over part of the house, would amount to the internal reconstruction of one wing; "turning it inside out, but saving its poor face," as Lady Kelmscot agreed. There was also a question of new cottages for outside servants at some little distance from the house at the back, and Lady Kelmscot accompanied Wedmore bareheaded to show him what was proposed.

"But you'll have to talk to Mr. Andrews about that," she said; "he can come to your office, if you will make an appointment."

Her manner suggested that she wanted to get rid of him; and, supposing that he would be left at the door, Wedmore made a few suggestions about how he proposed to treat the alterations.

"Well, make your plans or drawings, or whatever they are, though I don't suppose they will convey anything to me, and let me down as lightly as possible," said Lady Kelmscot, with her head turned away in a hostile gaze at the pleasing landscape. "We can put you up whenever you want to be here. I suppose Stuckey can do the work as well as anybody?"

Wedmore said that he could; and then, after a longish pause, Lady Kelmscot said abruptly,

"So you didn't get Moorend after all, Mr. Wedmore?"

Taken aback at the question, and supposing from its form that she was under some misapprehension, Wedmore explained that it was Sir John Pumphrey who didn't get Moorend.

"Yes, I know," said Lady Kelmscot impatiently, as if he had been over-precise, "but it was for you, wasn't it? That's the point,"

Her manner, as she said the last sentence, suggested some private enjoyment of his discomfiture, and he supposed that Stuekey had been chuckling to Mr. Andrews. Lady Kelmescot, however, went on, as she led the way towards the stables,

“ Well, it was a pity you couldn’t have Moorend. You appear to know what’s what—at any rate about houses. Did you ever see such a filthy mess in your life?—and there are a dozen men and boys with nothing else to do. Heaven knows that I didn’t want to sell Moorend, but one must get money somehow. We gave Martin Woodruff every chance to buy, but he couldn’t, or wouldn’t, raise the money. He’s hopelessly unbusinesslike. If he hadn’t been in such a desperate hurry he needn’t have turned out after all; for I understand that Stuekey is prepared to let the house at a low rent. It was the land he wanted. However, I suppose Martin knows his own business best.”

With the reflection that Lady Kelmescot seemed to be more expansive about Moorend and Martin Woodruff than she was about Stoke—for, with business despatched, her manner was much more leisurely, as she extended an apparently aimless walk round the outskirts of the house—Wedmore made some remark about Martin’s pleasing disposition.

“ Bless you, I’ve smacked him across my knee,” said Lady Kelmescot scornfully. “ Not that I have anything against Martin. He is a good boy, but he is helpless.”

The negative judgment reminded Wedmore of Dr. Shipton’s; and, with the thought that these people missed the positive qualities of Martin

Woodruff, he spoke of the success of "Saint Michael and All Angels."

"Yes, I know," said Lady Kelmscot drily; "we stopped the night in Cleeve at a very uncomfortable hotel on purpose to go to the concert. I am no judge of music, but so far as I could tell there was no nonsense about it; and there were some pretty tunes. We were a long way back, in a beastly draught, and my legs would hardly reach the floor, but the people round us seemed to be enjoying themselves thoroughly, and I never heard such a row as they made when it was over. Did you ever? Reminded me of the old days at Drury Lane."

From a long mental diversion, apparently to the old days, she returned to say, "Well, when are you going to be married, Mr. Wedmore?"

Startled at the question, he told her the date, and she said, "Not much time," so grimly that he laughed.

"What's the matter?" she asked sharply, facing him.

Wedmore said that he hadn't looked upon his marriage quite like that.

"Well, you never know," said Lady Kelmscot, turning to walk on. After a moment she added, "Miss Pumphrey is a tall handsome girl, with reddish hair, isn't she?"

With a mental reservation about the hair, he agreed to the description; and Lady Kelmscot said, "Well, well," and sighed. He supposed her to be reviewing her own experience of marriage, which he understood to have been disillusioning.

They had come round to the front door of the

house, and, supposing himself to be done with, Wedmore was on the point of asking if he should communicate with Mr. Andrews, when Lady Kelmseot said,

“Come along and have some tea . . . Trains? Oh, don't bother about trains; the car will run you down to the junction, and you can catch the mail to Barstow.”

Without waiting for his answer, she led the way across the hall and opened the door of the drawing-room, saying casually, as she did so,

“I think you know Miss Woodruff, don't you?”

At their entrance Beatrice rose with an “Oh!” of protest, and stood, with one hand on the back of a chair, looking reproachfully at Lady Kelmseot. The “we,” in allusion to the concert, which had left Wedmore vaguely speculating, was now explained. He did not suppose for a moment that Lady Kelmseot had got him there for this purpose; but that only made more significant Beatrice's apparent belief that she had.

Lady Kelmseot gave a short laugh which expressed conviction. “Bless me, Beatrice, Mr. Wedmore isn't a ghost!” she said, as she advanced into the big white-and-gold room.

Beatrice had recovered herself immediately, and came forward to give her hand to Wedmore. Of the two he now looked the more disconcerted, and she was woman enough to gain confidence from his confusion, so that her greeting was friendly and composed. Lady Kelmseot, watching them under her lids with a sort of malign benevolence, went on,

“As I told you, Beatrice came down for Martin's

concert, and she is stopping with me for a bit to cheer me up. We wanted Martin to have supper with us at our hotel, but he was already engaged to your friends, the Pumphreys. I'm sure he got a much better supper. So now you know all about it. But for Heaven's sake don't let us stand about like this ; let us be human for once in a way."

How much was intended by "human" Wedmore could not tell, but he received the definite impression that the sharp old lady, having confronted them and formed her conclusions, would be ruthless at any pretence that she was mistaken. As if to drive it home, Lady Kelmscot plumped herself on a sofa with a sigh, put up her short legs, and ostentatiously picked up the *Times*, leaving the other two to settle themselves where they chose.

The subject of the concert would have enabled them to get into conversation without any embarrassing pause, even if it had not had, for Wedmore, a private distraction. For two things were evident now: that Beatrice was the person Hilda had recognised in the audience when her eyes came to rest and she coloured apparently with pleasure; and that she knew, or guessed, that Beatrice would be at Stoke. Since there had been communication between Beatrice, or Lady Kelmscot, and Martin, it was almost impossible that Hilda did not know; yet she had said nothing. Her particular insistence that Wedmore should go to Stoke—even her nervous laugh and "Oh no, that would never do," when he had wished that she had been coming too, was now explained; though the reason was no clearer than her apparent disappointment that he had not seen

Beatrice in London ; unless, indeed, she were so uncertain of him that she wished to apply every test.

These reflections steadied Wedmore as he went on talking to Beatrice about her brother's great success ; and her unaffected rejoicing at it enabled her to speak freely, even to the extent of saying how much Martin owed to the Pumphreys.

"By the way, this will interest you, Beatrice," Lady Kelmseot interrupted them to say ; and she read out from the *Times* that "Saint Michael and All Angels" was already down for performance at Queen's Hall.

"Well, anyhow, Mr. Wedmore," she added, tossing the paper aside, "your visit to Moorend wasn't entirely wasted."

Conscious of what his visit to Moorend had done for himself, Wedmore was not ready with an answer ; but Beatrice said rather hurriedly,

"Yes, Mr. Wedmore was the introduction. Martin might have waited for ages and ages."

"Introduction to whom ?" said Lady Kelmseot, with a slight drawl.

"To Sir John Pumphrey," said Beatrice pointedly, looking at her hostess with eyes which were both resentful and imploring. "He has been splendid."

"M'm, yes ; Sir John Pumphrey seems to be a very splendid person," said Lady Kelmseot drily.

Taken with her drawl when she asked the question, it conveyed to Wedmore the warning that she was not to be trifled with ; but he found himself supporting Beatrice by speaking of what Sir John Pumphrey had done for him.

Lady Kelmseot listened with an ironical politeness

which seemed to suggest that his feeling was right and proper, but that this wasn't the time for right and proper feelings; and, as if to dismiss the subject, she said,

“Oh, Martin will get on very well. He only needs somebody to look after his practical affairs. Here comes tea; please pour it out, Beatrice.”

The very extremity of the situation, with no time to make up a plan of behaviour, made it seem natural—with the vivid naturalness of a situation in a dream. This effect was intensified by the unfamiliarity of the surroundings: the great room, far from luxuriously furnished, but bearing in every corner the look of easy acquisition of what ordinary people strive to get; and the simplicity of its mistress, kindly but a trifle insolent, as if she couldn't be bothered with scruples. There was nothing to connect the situation with everyday life and its obligations. They were irrelevant.

Wedmore found himself accepting the situation as if everything implied in it were openly stated; and, after her first discomfiture, Beatrice seemed to accept it too with how much positive pleasure he did not dare to ask, but certainly without regret.

Over the teacups she was as easy as she had been on his first visit to Moorend; and, but for her involuntary protest on his entrance, he could have believed her as indifferent to him now as then.

Whatever conclusions Lady Kelmscot had come to about his feelings for Beatrice, and whatever she had gleaned from Beatrice herself, this was meant to be an opportunity; a truancy from whatever irrelevant obligations he had chosen to saddle himself

with. If he bore himself at all awkwardly in it, Lady Kelmescot was quite capable of going off and leaving them together ; and that, he surmised, would be painful to Beatrice, as it would serve no purpose to himself. If he chose to consider himself bound by his obligations, there was nothing to be said that could not be said better in the large tolerance of this opportunity. On the other hand, at a word or a sign from him Lady Kelmescot would go ; but only on the distinct understanding that he had decided to disregard his obligations. She might have no scruples, but she would have things done decently and in order.

Unable to disregard his obligations, though he could waive them in the spirit of the occasion, Wedmore took the opportunity as it was offered, and allowed his feelings to appear as openly as if his hostess had not been in the room. He might have been the acknowledged lover, and she the duenna ; the more so because love was taken for granted and not expressed. There was complete understanding without a word of explanation.

He had muffed things horribly, but Beatrice was not resentful. The elaborate disguises in which he had wrapped her up in his imagination were now seen to be self-protective efforts to conceal the truth. The truth, now admitted, was as simple as Jack and Jill. Any resentment that she had felt in the past was at the concealment of the truth ; though he believed that what had made her avoid him, reject his mother's offer, and go to London, had not been resentment, but fear—fear that she might betray what he concealed. Driven into this corner, all she



claimed from him was the admission ; and, having it, she gave herself up to the moment, leaning back in her chair, with veiled eyes, arms at her sides and hands relaxed, as if under his actual caresses.

He did not flatter himself that she wanted him as he wanted her, but she was at least glad of his want, and that was enough for him. The complete passivity, which had been the mark of her in his imagination all along, he now saw to be her natural response to love, as, with wonder, he recognised it to be her strongest appeal for him.

For some reason, possibly the discrepancy in his own powers which had perplexed him all his life, he had always supposed that he needed active response to his passion ; now he saw that it was precisely what had led him astray : a short cut, leaving his deeper passion behind. To find himself, he must be giving, and not taking. He saw, too, or thought he saw, why, with no obvious right of intelligence or sympathy, she had invested herself in his vocational powers and aspirations. She was a creature so natural that she shared with Nature the power of inspiring what had been called the "pathetic fallacy."

They talked little enough, and about indifferent subjects, with long contented pauses, while he gave and she received all that he had of silent worship. He did not need Parsons now to tell him what she was like. She was a flower of the flesh, a little pinched, but brightened, by transplantation. As to one with a right to know by virtue of his late admission, she told him about her life in London, making him see that she was not discontented, but not

pretending that she was happy in an alien atmosphere. She was not resentful, but he must not be let off.

For he saw now exactly when and where his blunder had been made. It was when she said, unknowing, he could swear, what the words really meant, "I think I should like you to buy it"—that was to say, Moorend. His first instinct had been right; he ought to have had Moorend, and her too. Nature did not forgive the neglect of even her unconscious offers, and life ignored second thoughts.

The only time when Beatrice seemed a little disconcerted was when, after some remark of hers about her life with her aunt, Wedmore said that he wondered whether Martin would decide to go to London or stop in Barstow. She made no reply, but looked at him oddly—critically, he thought, as if she distrusted his good faith. He agreed mentally that Martin was irrelevant, a waste of their previous moments.

Lady Kelmscot spoke little, and evidently expected no attention; but she did not seem to be sitting out. Her presence was felt by Wedmore as a kind of savage tenderness for Beatrice and, for himself, a baffled scorn. Most emphatically, she knew the sort of fool one was, but her knowledge was not altogether disrespectful. She was a woman of the world, with an open mind about the wisdom of heroic remedies. Only, she would give heroic remedies their chance. From time to time she sighed—impatiently rather than sadly.

When the room began to darken she said half-heartedly, "Shall we have lights?" and they

both said, "No," without even the consultation of a glance. But the question had reminded them that the moments were running out, and they hardly spoke again.

Presently, with a "Don't move," Lady Kelmscot got up and went and stood by the window, staring out. Her short, sturdy figure, dark against the evening sky, was a monument of inattention. Just for a few moments, with breath answering breath in the quiet of the darkening room, Wedmore hung on the edge of the heroic remedy. It must be done in words now, and completely; any half-measure to gain time, like the touching of hands, would be bitterly resented. The irony of it was that, in the region of words, of conscious thoughts, even, his loyalty to Hilda was assured. The deadly discrepancy held, even here. So he said nothing; and Lady Kelmscot said, turning round abruptly, with a little shiver, as she rubbed her hands,

"Well, you had better ring for the car, Beatrice."

That broke the spell, and with lights and movement they were talking briskly as if the opportunity had never been given. They joined hands frankly, at parting, and looked eye to eye with the assurance that all was for the best.

Lady Kelmscot said, "Well, Mr. Wedmore, let me know when you are ready to begin your measuring, or whatever it is. I shall be pleased to see you, but I can't promise you Miss Woodruff another time."

He agreed mentally that it would be an anti-climax. What had to be done had been done, and he had put himself right with Beatrice for ever and

ever. They could meet again as good friends, but not here.

In the train he debated how he should speak of Beatrice to Hilda. He had no doubt that she knew that Beatrice would probably be at Stoke. Hilda, like Lady Kelmscot, had given him an opportunity for heroic remedies, and he could hardly let her know that he had rejected the remedies merely by carrying on. Some verbal recognition of her generosity was demanded. But it would be better, he decided, to wait for the inspiration of her presence.

When, at about seven o'clock, he reached his lodgings, he found an agitated landlady who told him that Sir John Pumphrey had been sending messengers for him for the last three hours. Would he please go up to Riverside at once?

He was there in twenty minutes.

Sir John met him in the hall with a letter in his hand. "Hilda has gone to London with Woodruff," he said. "Thank God your banns had not been published. Here, I suppose," he put the unopened letter into Wedmore's hand, "is the wretched girl's explanation to you."

## CHAPTER XXIX

ANY feeling of humiliation which Wedmore might have had at being jilted within a month of his marriage was immediately lost in remorseful concern for Hilda at having to jilt him. That she had done so proved what she must have been suffering. She might, as her mother had said, be romantic, but, apart from pain at having to break her word, she would hate the publicity which the step involved. Her letter, when her father's abuse of her and Woodruff and apologies to him allowed him to read it, told him nothing that he had not seen in a flash when he heard she was gone.

Hilda began without preliminaries :

“ At the last moment, I can't. My only excuse is that Martin needs me and you don't. I can't put it more simply than that. But Martin has been perfectly loyal to you—though, as others if not you must have seen, his wishes have been against yours for some time, almost from the first. It was not until yesterday that he spoke plainly. I asked him to wait until this morning for an answer, and then I gave it, and we acted directly, so there was no plotting. We are cutting the knot. You have never been compared, you can't be compared ;

it is a different feeling altogether, and the strength of it is that I can't explain it. I know that you like Martin, and I really believe that I shall bring you closer together as his wife than as yours."

Then there was a passage crossed out, and she concluded :

"What I hope, what we both hope, is that you will find good cause to forgive us.

"HILDA."

Wedmore knew what she had crossed out. She had made some reference, more or less direct, to Beatrice, but had been too generous to let anything stand which might seem to palliate her conduct. She had been hoping that he would do or say something which might prevent the necessity; that was the meaning of her disappointment that he hadn't seen Beatrice in London, and her eagerness that he should go to Stoke; but he had given her no alternative, no appearance of right except the vague hope for a "good cause" that he might forgive.

What, in the first shock, had puzzled him—that, knowing that he would probably see Beatrice at Stoke, she hadn't waited until he came back before giving her answer to Woodruff—now struck him as a touching tribute to his loyalty. She knew that he wouldn't help her out by failing her, and that she must be the one to act. She couldn't, he thought grimly, as he folded up the letter, be expected to see that, by not failing her, he had banished the "good cause."

Instead of handing the letter to Sir John, who had been waiting anxiously to read it, he said,

“Hilda has done right.”

“That’s very generous of you, my dear fellow,” said Sir John, in a burst of relief which suggested that the fact of the elopement did not worry him so much as might have been supposed. “I blame myself for having thrown them together,” he went on; “but who could have supposed that the fellow would presume? He seemed such a sheep. Well, as they say, you never know where you are with the quiet ones.”

“If you ask me, I don’t think that had anything to do with it—not the way they were thrown together, I mean,” said Wedmore, surprised at his own discovery.

Hilda’s experience, he saw on reflection, must have been pretty much like his own. The mischief, if mischief it could be called, had been done at her first visit to Moorend. All the rest was only the difference between them in the way they reacted to the poison—as he had called it at the time; and the similarity of the poison, as represented by the likeness between brother and sister, was, in itself, evidence that he and Hilda were not too well suited. Hilda took longer to react, and, for a time, he surmised, she had been jealous of Beatrice; but as soon as she recognised that she was in love with Martin she had hoped that Beatrice would be the solution.

Her motive in pushing Wedmore towards Beatrice, though perhaps unconscious, had been more honest than his in encouraging her association with Martin,

because he had been concerned chiefly to show by contrast how unreasonable were any doubts of himself. Hilda might have tried to escape love, but she had not sought security in misrepresenting it. Finding that he would not face the truth, she had done her best to keep her word; and he interpreted, "At the last moment, I can't," at the beginning of her letter, as a direct sequel to her "Indeed, indeed, I'll try!" when they had renewed their pledges in their future home.

The honour of the family being, so to speak, vindicated by Wedmore's stoical behaviour, Sir John said,

"Well, come along and see what Annie has to say about it."

Lady Pumphrey, as Wedmore half expected, had very little to say about it. She was not remarkably intelligent, but her intuitions were sound; and, though she had been crying, she was evidently relieved at the end of what she felt to be an unsatisfactory situation. Seated in her usual place by the drawing-room fire, she greeted Wedmore with a placid though sympathetic, "Well, James?" and, without further words, handed him the note which Hilda had left for her.

To her mother Hilda had written :

"You will be sorry, but I don't think you will be surprised when I tell you that I find I can't marry Jim, after all, and have gone to London with Martin. There's not the least reason for anxiety, mumsie dear. I shall stop for the night at the Somerset Hotel, where everybody knows me, just as if I were



up for an ordinary visit to town; and Martin will get a special license to-morrow, and we shall be married quietly in church. I have written to Jim. I am sorry to do it this way, but I believe it is best for everybody. Don't let father do anything ridiculous—try to prevent us, I mean. I have plenty of money for the present.”

“The best thing we can do,” said Wedmore, as he handed back the note, “is to obey Hilda's wishes to the letter. Woodruff will do all that is right, and Hilda will do all that is necessary.”

He was not conscious as he spoke of the epigrammatic propriety of the last sentence, but Sir John must have felt something of the sort, for he said,

“I will say that Hilda's got her head screwed on all right, and I am willing to bet that it was she who thought out this little plan; and, at any rate, we were not mistaken about the fellow's talent.” He allowed a decorous pause, and then added, “Have you seen to-day's *Times*?”

Wedmore said truthfully that he had not. He understood the point of the allusion, but he did not feel called upon to explain why he understood it; and when Sir John handed him the paper he could not help feeling that Sir John's genuine concern for him was distinctly tempered with the reflection that, when the inevitable comment broke out, Hilda's choice could not be called contemptible. Indeed, since the thing had been done, Wedmore was not so certain that Sir John would dislike the publicity.

Wedmore read the paragraph and said, “Woodruff deserves everything that can be done for him.”

“Oh, we shall have to see them through,” said Sir John reassuringly.

There was nothing more to be said, except a short account from Lady Pumphrey of how the thing had happened. Hilda had gone out in the morning, saying that she should not be back to lunch. Presumably she had taken her answer to Woodruff in person. Polly, in quest of hairpins, had found the notes on Hilda's dressing-table. Directly Lady Pumphrey had read the one addressed to her, she telephoned to Wedmore's office, but learnt that he had gone to Stoke.

Evidently Hilda had not told her family that he was going; and this, together with the fact that neither she nor Woodruff had mentioned the presence of Beatrice at the concert, was sufficient proof to Wedmore that what they both hoped was not a figure of speech. Consideration for Lady Pumphrey kept him from speaking of Beatrice now, though he said what his business at Stoke had been, finding great relief in the distraction.

Like one who has received an unexpected physical blow, he was entirely unable to tell if he were hurt or not; and the necessity for marking time in the presence of the Pumphreys made him feel horribly insincere.

Hilda telegraphed to her mother the next day the fact of her marriage, and then wrote giving an address in Chelsea where her clothes might be sent. She and Martin would stop there for the present, and there was no need for anybody to worry about anything. Martin had arranged with his deputy to carry on at Saint Michael's.

Sir John's formal announcement of the marriage in the London papers, following so soon upon the success of "Saint Michael and All Angels," and the familiarity of his name, produced a crop of "romantic" paragraphs; but the previous engagement being of only local interest was not mentioned in them, and the local papers were discreet.

Possibly there is no loss harder to bear at the moment than that which contains an element of relief; and Wedmore was not let off lightly. Sentimentally, he had fallen between two stools; been jilted by one woman, and put obstacles in the way of any future approach to the other. On the one hand he could not accept implied sympathy without the feeling that he was getting it on false pretences, and on the other he could not reject it without seeming to undervalue Hilda. The sympathy, too, conveyed a condemnation of Hilda which he knew to be unjust but could not refute, because the real excuse for her was only a matter of feeling. She might be justified in his own mind, but he had done nothing to make her seem so to other people.

Altogether, he had it well brought home to him that love really did mean giving up everything—even the appearance of loyalty—and that Hilda had been the one with courage to put it into practice.

How much or how little Miss Archdale had influenced Hilda in making up her mind was not apparent, but, after an interval, Wedmore received a letter from her asking him not to judge Hilda too harshly. Life was life. She, Miss Archdale, had seen the danger all along, but when she had tried to warn him—did he remember?—he had seemed

incredulous. Knowing her intimacy with Hilda, the Pumphreys blamed her for not having warned them ; but what could she do ? He, at any rate, would understand her anxiety to disregard personal motives. She hoped that an acquaintance so valued by herself would be renewed in happier circumstances.

Fortunately, Wedmore had plenty to do, and he found his best relief in concentrating upon the practical advantages he derived from the breaking of the Pumphrey connection. Until he was free of it, he had not realised how much the small concessions, social and otherwise, involved had hindered the exercise of his full powers. If he were to do himself justice he must for a long time disregard the ambitious designs which brought reputation, and devote himself to the humdrum tasks which the real needs of the moment presented.

His collaboration with Stuckey in a scheme of small houses for working people was a case in point ; and the somewhat fantastic idea of a monument of renunciation and resolution in respect of two women, now took on the more sober meaning of a monument of accepted responsibility.

The opening of the Institute in April, when Sir John Pumphrey took every opportunity to bring him forward, was for him the closing of a chapter in his professional life.

## CHAPTER XXX

FOR some time Wedmore did not allow himself to think about Beatrice at all ; and, when he did, he could not see how that chapter in his life was to be re-opened. For Beatrice herself, the afternoon at Stoke must have closed it finally, and the fact that Hilda wouldn't have him, after all, would be no recommendation of him to her. Particularly since, as he now felt sure, she must have known then that her brother was in love with Hilda : her critical glance at him when he had spoken of Martin's future movements proved that ; and it was probable that her avoidance of the Pumphreys had been due as much to the same cause as to the wish to avoid Wedmore.

Not only that, but he believed that she had at least confided in Lady Kelmscot her anxiety about her brother. As long as he could, he put off writing to Lady Kelmscot's agent about the proposed alterations at Stoke ; and when Lady Kelmscot herself replied to the effect that, if he did not mind, she would prefer that the work were not begun until the autumn, he took it as an instance of grim consideration for his feelings.

Meanwhile Stuckey, in spite of their close collaboration, said nothing about what he meant to do with Moorend. Gilbert Stuckey, who had now come into Wedmore's office as articled pupil, was equally reserved; so that, on their visits to Moorend for the purpose of surveying, Wedmore had the ridiculous feeling of skirting the subject. The boy and girl engagement between Gilbert and Polly Pumphrey being now officially recognised, and the circumstances of both permitting an early marriage, Wedmore sometimes wondered if Stuckey were keeping the house for them.

The sterile situation might have continued indefinitely if it had not been for Dr. Shipton. Meeting Wedmore at Moorend on an afternoon at the end of April, he asked him to come in for a smoke; and, after some desultory conversation, he said bluntly,

"Why don't you ask Stuckey to let you have Moorend?"

"What for?" said Wedmore.

"Well, you might sub-let it to Beatrice Woodruff," said Shipton with a drawl and a sidelong glance.

Wedmore looked at him for a moment, and then said, "Give me her address."

Dr. Shipton wrote it out composedly, and then said, "The important thing in this uncertain life is to see the crucial point. I saw that our friend Pumphrey mustn't get his claws into Moorend."

"By the way," said Wedmore, "what exactly did you do at the auction?"

"Nothing," said Shipton, "or next to nothing."

“But I saw you look at Pumphrey.”

“Ah, you noticed that, did you?” said Shipton complacently. “I was just trying a little experiment. Could you bear to hear something slightly to the discredit of our friend? Mind you, I’ve never told another living soul. Did you ever hear of the good ship *Boscastle*, sailing out of Barstow in the Jamaica trade, with occasional passengers?”

Wedmore said that he had not.

“Well, there was a good deal of talk about her at the time,” said Shipton, rubbing his tobacco thoughtfully between his palms. “Pumphrey was not so flourishing then as he is now; in fact, he was going through a financial crisis. I sailed in the *Boscastle* as doctor; and, on the voyage out, light, the old man had the misfortune to pile her up on the Stones, off St. Ives, just as a gale was brewing. There was very nearly a nasty accident. I got nothing worse than a wet jacket; but the old man got a chill—or a fright—from which he never recovered; and, before he died, he—apologised—to me for his bad seamanship. As I take a tolerant view of human nature in a tight corner, and nobody else was any the worse for the accident, I said nothing until the inquiry was over. In any case, I was not a practical seaman. But when it was all over, and Pumphrey’s insurance claim had been paid, I went to him. I didn’t take by any means a lofty line. I made it a personal matter, talked about my wet jacket, and the risk to my precious skin. Pumphrey had the bad taste to suggest a thousand pounds. That got my goat, and I was opening out when Pumphrey

reminded me that, by keeping silence at the inquiry, I had in fact compounded. He had me there. But I was left with what might be called a moral card to play."

"But did you tell this to Stuckey?" said Wedmore, with a vague feeling of repulsion.

"No, my young friend, I did not," said Dr. Shipton severely. "As I remarked before, Stuckey is an intellectual flat-foot, and not to be trusted with delicate scruples of morality. But when I heard that Stuckey was after Moorend against Pumphrey—as to which you probably know more than I do—it occurred to me that I might play the part of the last straw. I assure you that I did not say a word to Stuckey; I merely showed myself to Pumphrey at a critical moment, and it came off. . . . So, in a manner of speaking, you may be said to owe your opportunity to offer to sub-let Moorend to Beatrice Woodruff to my wet jacket in ninety-something—and good luck to you."

When, with a due sense of the proper order of things, Wedmore asked Stuckey if he would let him have Moorend, that masterpiece of discretion said laconically, "Yes, Mr. Wedmore," and suggested a comfortable arrangement in which the financial terms of their collaboration in the building scheme might be taken into account. That settled, with no further questions asked, Wedmore took train to London, arriving there at midday.

Directly he introduced himself to the elder Miss Woodruff, in her pretty drawing-room in St. John's Wood, he saw that though she might be, as Shipton



said, a "sacramentalist," she was also a woman of tact and imagination. She asked no explanation of his visit, but said that Beatrice would be back from her walk in a few minutes.

When Beatrice came into the room Wedmore took her hands and said, "Will you marry me to-morrow?"

She said, "Yes, if you like."

With a cunning inspired by what he had heard from Shipton and Parsons, Wedmore then turned to her aunt and asked her which was the best church in the neighbourhood.

Obviously flattered at being taken for granted as a practical person, surprised at nothing, she said, "Oh, Saint Cuthbert's, undoubtedly," and asked Beatrice if she had remembered the eggs.

By the evening Wedmore had sent reply-paid telegrams to his partner and Stuckey, giving certain directions, and received satisfactory answers, procured a special license, made arrangements with the vicar of Saint Cuthbert's, and hired a motor-car for the morning.

They were married at half-past eight. He kissed her once, but only for politeness, because she was not yet really Beatrice for him. Their journey in the car might have been a holiday excursion, and their lunch, among the bluebells in Savernake Forest, included some of the eggs which Beatrice had bought yesterday. The chauffeur, a serious young man, who shared their meal, gave them his views about domestic felicity.

It was not until they had passed Churton Abbey

that Beatrice began to distinguish her surroundings, clutched Wedmore's arm, and said,

“ Oh, where are we going ? ”

“ To Moorend,” he said ; and so it was that, with supreme contentment, Wedmore brought home a weeping bride.

THE END





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By UNA L. SILBERRAD

Author of "Green Pastures," etc.

The scene of Miss Silberrad's new novel is laid partly in London and partly in Kendal and the moor country that lies on the border of Westmorland and Yorkshire. It is the story of how a sober, middle-aged citizen of the seventeenth century came into a fortune and found romance; and of the unexpected things that happened as a result of this change in his circumstances. There is a very charming love interest in the story, as one would expect from the author of "Green Pastures" and "Sampson Rideout—Quaker."

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## **Truth in a Circle**

By MADAME ALBANESI

Author of "Poppies in the Corn," etc.

This excellent collection of Madame Albanesi's short stories will be of great interest to all admirers of her work, as it contains much that is representative of the distinctive quality of her writing. All these stories are modern, and deal with every-day life, some grave and some gay, but every one of interest to lovers of good fiction.

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By AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

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**The Road to Anywhere** By RITA

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Author of "The Magnetic North," etc.

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